

TEXAS' INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT FOR VETERANS

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
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TEXAS' INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT FOR VETERANS

Wednesday, November 6, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., at the Bill Daniel Student Center, Baylor University, 1311 South 5th Street, Waco, Texas, Hon. Bill Flores [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Flores and Takano.

Also Present: Representative Williams.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL FLORES,

Mr. Flores. Good morning. I would like to call the subcommittee to order.

And the first thing I would like to do is to introduce Judge Ken Starr, the president of Baylor University, who is going to say a few words. Before he gets up here, I would like to ask us all to give him and all of the Baylor team a round of applause for being such great hosts today.

[Applause.]

Judge Starr. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

We are honored at Baylor to have you here, from Riverside and the great Inland Empire of California to Fort Worth and the great district that runs from Tarrant County down to Hays County. And of course, the chairman is our own Member of the House of Representatives. So, Congressman Flores, Mr. Chairman, we are delighted that you are here.

You know, at Baylor, we have billboards that say things such as "Baylor loves Waco." We could quite readily have a billboard that says "Baylor loves veterans."

We have close to 100 student veterans here who are very active in the organization that really promotes veteran welfare, beginning right here at home on the Baylor campus, but also much more generally. You know, it was General Washington, who was quite a veteran himself, in that magnificent speech, a member of his own officers—when he was facing a mutiny of this one officer—was talking about growing old in the service of his country.

And at a dramatic moment, he reached into his breast pocket and pulled out his spectacles and paused dramatically. And he asked his officers, who were on the verge of mutiny, to bear with him because of his growing old in the service of his country.

We owe again to General Washington and the great sons of the Revolution, century after century, down to the 21st century, an unpayable debt, a moral debt and other debts to our veterans. And so, we are so thankful that you are here to focus on issues that are of concern to the veterans, their loved ones, but also to the American people.

So God bless this committee. We are able to say that here at Baylor University. We love the fact that our elected representatives from Texas, from California, and our own congressman has seen fit to honor Baylor University, the oldest continually operating university in the State of Texas chartered by the Republic of Texas, older than Texas itself.

Welcome to Baylor University.

[Applause.]

Mr. Flores. I thank everyone for joining us today for today's field hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

I am Congressman Bill Flores, and not only is it my pleasure to serve as congressman for the great City of Waco and the rest of the 17th District of Texas, but also to serve as the chairman of this subcommittee. Whether it is the popular post 9/11 GI bill or rehabilitation and training for disabled veterans, the goal of the subcommittee is to ensure that our veterans have economic opportunity and success.

I am proud of the work that—the great work that we have already accomplished this year by improving the Transition Assistance Program, which assists service members' transition to civilian life, streamlining the processing of the GI bill benefits, examining educational outcomes for student veterans, and various other legislative and oversight accomplishments to improve the lives of America's veterans.

I am joined here this morning by my colleague and ranking Democratic member of the subcommittee, Mr. Mark Takano of California. Mr. Takano is a former educator from Riverside, California, and it was a pleasure to be in his district on Monday for another field hearing on educational opportunities for veterans. We had a great turnout, and we learned a lot from the panelists and the witnesses at that hearing.

I am very happy to have him here today, and I hope all of you will show him some of our Texas hospitality while he is with us. So welcome to you, Mr. Takano, and thanks again for traveling to Waco to be with us today.

[Applause.]

STATEMENT OF THE HON. BILL FLORES, Chairman

"Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans"

November 6, 2013

Good morning everyone and the Subcommittee will come to order.

I thank everyone for joining us for today's field hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

As many of you know, I am Congressman Bill Flores and not only is it my pleasure to serve as the congressman for the great city of Waco and the rest of the 17th district of Texas, but to also serve as the Chairman of this Subcommittee.

Whether it is the popular Post 9/11 G.I. Bill or rehabilitation and training for disabled veterans, the goal of the subcommittee is ensuring that veterans have economic opportunity and success.

I am proud of the great work we have already accomplished this year by improving the transition assistance program which assists servicemembers' transition to civilian life, streamlining the processing of G.I. Bill benefits, examining education outcomes for student veterans, and various other legislative and oversight accomplishments to improve the lives of America's veterans.

I am joined here this morning by my colleague and Ranking Democratic Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Mark Takano of California. Mr. Takano is a former educator from Riverside, California, and it was a pleasure to be in his district on Monday for another field hearing.

I am very happy to have him here today and I hope you all will show him some of our famous Texas hospitality while he is with us. So welcome to you Mr. Takano and thanks again for traveling to Waco to be with us today.

I also want to extend a special thanks to Baylor University who has graciously provided the facilities for our use today.

We are here this morning to focus on one of the most important goals I have for this subcommittee - reducing unemployment amongst our nation's veterans. While this is a hearing we could easily have had in Washington, DC, I think it is very important to hear from folks first hand here in Texas about this issue.

We are lucky, that the unemployment rate for veterans in Texas was 5.5% for the month of September, which is well below the national average of 6.8%.

We all know that some of the reasons for this difference is our great state's focus on pro-growth policies, low taxes, and efficient and innovative government programs that partner with the private and non-profit sector to give unemployed veterans the little boost they need to be successful.

I would also be remiss if I did not highlight the people of Texas' long standing commitment to the military and those who have served as another major reason for our success. This is shown not only in the priority our small and large businesses place on hiring veterans, but on the policies, programs, and benefits our institutions of higher learning offer to these heroes.

I am excited for our witnesses today to bring attention to these laudable efforts and hope we can bottle a bit of that Texas magic and share it with the rest of the country.

Congress can write all the laws and create all the programs they want, but as a former businessman myself, I know that jobs for veterans start and end with continued commitment from American enterprise.

While we will hear about many successes today, our work in Congress is never complete, and I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists about how we can improve the oversight of federal programs to help put our veterans back to work.

A few housekeeping items before I recognize the Ranking Member. I want to remind our audience that today's hearing is not a town hall and we will be hearing only from members and invited panelists. My staff and I would be happy to speak with members of the public following the hearing. I would also like to point out Penny Forrest and Jessica McKinney with my staff, who are available to help you with any veteran casework issues you may have.

Finally, I want to thank my Texas colleague and good friend, Roger Williams, for being with us for this important hearing today. Mr. Williams represents Texas' 25th Congressional District and has a number of Texas veterans in his district. I ask that our colleague Mr. Williams be allowed to sit at the dais and ask questions. Hearing no objection so ordered.

I now recognize Mr. Takano for any opening remarks he may have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE HON. MARK TAKANO

Mr. Takano. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am very happy to be in Waco this morning, meeting so many of your constituents involved in finding good-paying, long-term jobs for America's veterans. I know I certainly appreciate the way in which you have conducted the hearings and the way you run our committee.

We have a strong bipartisan history on the Veterans' Committee. While much of the Congress is at odds with each other, at the Veterans' Committee, we often pass legislation by voice vote, and certainly your subcommittee is in line with that tradition.

I appreciate the opportunity to hear firsthand about the innovative approaches to hiring and educating veterans in Texas. I am very interested in hearing about the successful outcomes of these approaches.

We heard from my local colleges on Monday, and today I look forward to hearing from Baylor and your own alma mater, Texas A&M University. Employment continues to be a challenge for veterans across the country, and looking at different models for assisting veterans in finding jobs is very helpful, especially as we review national policy.

I also want to highlight a program in my own State of California that is doing great things to assist unemployed members of the National Guard to find jobs. The Work for Warriors program places unemployed CNG members directly into jobs.

Staff members connect with businesses to identify job openings, find qualified unemployed CNG members, and guide CNG members through resume and interview preparation and other elements of the hiring process. Since its establishment in 2012, WFW has successfully placed over 16,005 Guardsmen in jobs, 2 to 3 placements per day.

While successful Federal veterans employment initiatives typically cost over \$10,000 per placement, the program—this program that I am talking about has a total per placement cost roughly of \$500 per placement. This is something I would like to see replicated for Reservists and veterans, and I hope it will soon spread to other States.

I know the Texas Veterans Commission seeks to advocate and provide superior services to veterans to significantly improve their lives. Thank you for what you do in Texas, and for all our veterans who retire here and decide to come back to Texas.

And I just want to add offhand, I know that California took Texas' lead in the size of the backlog. The way you are trying to solve the backlog problem in the State of Texas by supplementing the number of case workers at the VA with state workers is something we in California, are trying to do too after looking at the successful implementation here.

I look forward to hearing the witnesses' testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

I also would like to extend a special thanks to Baylor University, who has graciously provided the facilities for our use today.

We are here this morning to focus on one of the most important goals that I have for this subcommittee, and that is reducing unemployment amongst our Nation's veterans. While this is a hearing that we could easily have in Washington, D.C., I think it is very important to hear from folks firsthand here in Texas about this issue.

Nobody knows these issues better than those right here in the real world. We are lucky that the unemployment rate in Texas for veterans was 5.5 percent last month, which is well below the national average of 6.8 percent. But still, we need to do more.

We all know that some of the reasons for this difference is our great State's focus on pro-growth policies, low taxes, and efficient and innovative government programs that partner with the private and nonprofit sector to give unemployed veterans the helpful tools that they need to be successful.

I would also be remiss if I did not highlight the people of Texas' longstanding commitment to the military and those who have served us as another major reason for our success. This is shown not only in the priority that our small and large businesses place on hiring veterans, but also on policies, programs, and benefits that our institutions of higher learning offer to these heroes.

I am excited for our witnesses today to bring attention to these laudable efforts, and I hope that we can bottle a little bit of that Texas experience and share it with the rest of the country, particularly back in Washington.

As we all know, Congress can write all the laws and create all the programs that it wants. But as a former business person myself, I know that jobs for veterans start and stop with the continued commitment from American private enterprise. While we will hear about many successes today, our work in Congress is never complete, and I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists about how we can improve the oversight of Federal programs to help put more of our veterans back to work.

Now a few housekeeping issues before I recognize other persons on the dais today. I want to remind our audience that today's hearing is not a town hall. We will be hearing only today from the panelists and the Members of Congress.

My staff and I would be happy to speak with members of the public following the hearing, and I would also like to point out Jes-

sie McKinney, with my staff—Jessie, will you please stand? Over here. Jessica, with my staff, and Luke Connolly are available here to answer any questions you may have.

We also have a veterans resource center that is available outside the door, either immediately following the hearing.

Finally, I would like to thank my Texas colleague and good friend Roger Williams for being with us today for this important hearing. Mr. Williams represents the 25th Congressional District and has a number of Texas veterans in his district.

I ask that our colleague Mr. Williams be allowed to sit at the dais and ask questions. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

I would also like to let everybody know that we have two representatives from Congressman Carter's office here today Greg Schannap and Cheryl Hassmann. Would you please stand? So thank you for being here and representing Judge Carter at this hearing today.

Mr. Takano, do you have any follow-on opening comments?

Mr. Takano. I do not, sir.

Mr. Flores. Okay. I now recognize Mr. Williams for any opening comments that you may have.

Mr. Williams. Thank you, Chairman Flores.

And I would like to start by thanking you for all the work you have done and appreciate that very much.

And Ranking Member Takano, one of my colleagues, for your hard work and for your leadership.

I would also like to say real quick there is a football game coming up Thursday.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Williams. And I am pretty good at predicting scores. So I am going to predict the Baylor Bears over the Oklahoma Sooners, 35–21.

[Applause.]

Mr. Williams. I would also want to thank all of those who are here to testify today. Appreciate that. Your investment, your leadership on this issue is greatly appreciated.

And at a point in time when Washington, I think my colleagues will agree, seems very divided on just about everything, supporting our veterans is something we can all and will always agree on.

Many have signed up more in recent years to protect our great Nation, stepping up to answer the call of duty, and we are forever indebted and forever grateful for their service and their sacrifice. It is now our duty to make sure these veterans are given all the resources needed to transition back to a civilian lifestyle.

In Texas' 25th Congressional District, which I represent, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to represent Foot Hood and its surrounding communities. And after speaking with many of these communities, I can tell you they want veterans to stay.

Veterans are America's greatest asset. We must always remember that. And they need to be given opportunities to succeed as civilians.

Thus, we must create an environment that is friendly toward our veterans, whether they are looking to step into the workforce or further their education. And I am proud to say that the House has recently passed H.R. 2011 and H.R. 2481 with the help of Leader

Flores, aimed to advance our veterans in both the workforce and the classroom.

Our veterans deserve the very best, and the current unemployment rate among veterans should never be the norm. Texas is home to an extraordinary number of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, many of whom call central Texas their home. They are the true heroes and heroines of our country, and I vow to continue, as my colleagues do, to stand for them, just as they have stood for us and will stand for us.

So I appreciate being here today. And may God bless all of you, and may God bless our troops and our veterans as we move forward.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

[Applause.]

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

Our first panel will have Ms. Mary Kennedy Thompson, with Mr. Rooter, LLC; Mr. David Amsden, with Cognizant Technology Solutions; Mr. Chris Burton, with the Home Depot; Mr. John Vizner, with Caterpillar Global Work Tools; and Mr. Joseph Kopser from RideScout.

Each of you will be recognized for 5 minutes, and we will begin with Ms. Thompson.

I would like to say this at the beginning. You will see some lights on your table there. The green light means that you have got—your time has started. The yellow light means that you have a minute left. The red light means that we need to wrap up pretty quickly.

So, with that, I would like to recognize Ms. Thompson.

STATEMENT OF MARY KENNEDY THOMPSON

Ms. Thompson. Good morning, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and the subcommittee. Thank you so much for bringing us here together today.

I am Mary Kennedy Thompson, and I am the president of Mr. Rooter Plumbing, which is the world's largest all-franchised plumbing company.

I am a veteran, having served 8 years in the United States Marine Corps as a logistics officer. I am the daughter of a Vietnam veteran. I am the wife of a veteran. I am the sister of a veteran, and I am a friend of many veterans across the United States and across the world.

As the president of Mr. Rooter, I am a proud brand of the Dwyer Group brands that include Aire Serv, Glass Doctor, Grounds Guys, Mr. Electric, Mr. Appliance, Rainbow, and Mr. Rooter. And in 2006, I was chosen to be the first female president of the 40-year-old Mr. Rooter brand. It is my honor to be here talking to you today.

I am here representing the Dwyer Group and the International Franchise Association in our work with VetFran. In 2012, PricewaterhouseCoopers conducted a study that showed that 820,000 franchise establishments are across the United States, generating 17 million jobs. That is close to one in eight jobs in the United States.

I came into franchising as a franchisee first. When I left the Marine Corps, I came in as a Cookies by Design franchisee, and that company helped create wealth for me. It helped create jobs for my

community. And when I was a multi-unit franchisee in Austin, Texas, I employed close to 50 employees during my time.

Franchising is the great American dream, and it created for me and my family something that I had looked for for a long time after serving in the Marine Corps.

VetFran was started right here in Waco, Texas. It was founded by Don Dwyer Sr., who was the CEO of the Dwyer Group at the time and the founder. And he decided in 1991 that we had to come together and we had to offer our veterans opportunities in small business ownership and asked franchisors to come together and offer their best discounts.

And then, in 9/11, Dina Dwyer-Owens, who is the CEO of the Dwyer Group now, she relaunched VetFran and said we have got to do more. We have got to offer more.

In 2011, we partnered with the first lady, who was doing Joining Forces, and launched Operation Enduring Opportunity. And with Operation Enduring Opportunity, we pledged the franchising community to hire 80,000 veterans by 2014. We launched it November 10th of 2011.

I am proud to announce that with the Dwyer Group, we have—since that time, we have brought in 298 veterans into small business ownership, offering \$1.8 million in discounts. And I am announcing here for the first time that we, the franchising community, have brought in and hired 151,557 veterans since November of 2011.

We have also brought into small business ownership 5,192 veterans. Something that started here in Waco, Texas, has affected 151,000 veterans.

Veterans make great franchisees, and they make great employees in franchising because franchising is about the systems, it is about the discipline, and it needs leaders. And veterans have that. They understand what systems to the core of their being. They understand and have had experience with leadership, whether they are a staff sergeant or whether they are a Navy captain. They understand that.

Since we launched Operation Enduring Opportunity at the Dwyer Group, our brands have hired 624 veterans. I have two veterans here with me today. Captain John Mendel, who is a retired captain who served in Baghdad and Bahrain, is our new vice president of operations for Mr. Rooter, joined us about a year ago. And Jason Lee, staff sergeant in the United States Army, and he has toured in Kuwait and Iraq. And I thank them both for their service.

I would like to ask everyone here in this subcommittee to consider bringing to the 113th Congress the Help Veterans Own Franchises Act. It would offer a tax credit of 50 percent to veterans for their franchise fee, and it would be capped at \$25,000.

I would just like to remind everybody that when that veteran starts that small business not only is he providing a job and opportunity for his family, but he is also providing jobs for those in his community. And that is something that can make a very large difference.

I would like to thank everyone here for what you are doing. I remember watching a TV commercial once where everybody got up

and gave an ovation to all the veterans. And I would like to say this. Let us not just give them an ovation. Let us give them a vocation.

Let us give them the power to prosper, and I thank you for your very good work here.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Thompson]

Testimony of Mary Kennedy Thompson

On Behalf of The Dwyer Group and International Franchise Association

November 6, 2013

Good morning Congressman Flores and members of the subcommittee. My name is Mary Kennedy Thompson and I am President of Mr. Rooter Plumbing based in Waco, TX, which is a proud brand of The Dwyer Group family of service enterprises representing more than 1600 franchisees worldwide and 124 franchisees in Texas employing more than 850 people. I am honored to have the opportunity to speak at this field hearing of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on "Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans." Taking care of our veterans who have faithfully served our country is a subject that is very near and dear to my heart as is the Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative, or VetFran.

In 1985, I received my commission as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps where I served for eight years and achieved the rank of Captain while on active duty. During my service, I had the honor to become the first female platoon commander for my unit and my service took me around the world, including North Carolina, California the Philippines and Japan. When I returned home to Texas I made the decision to go into franchising. I became a franchisee in the Cookies by Design system in Austin, Texas where I earned company awards for Top Performer and Outstanding Customer Service. After I sold my businesses, the corporate office asked me to join the headquarters as the Director of Franchise Operations, eventually becoming the brand's President. I came to Mr. Rooter in October of 2006 to proudly serve the 40 year old company as its first female President.

I appear before you today on behalf of The Dwyer Group and the International Franchise Association (IFA). The Dwyer Group opened its doors in 1981 with only one brand and has grown to become the holding company of seven service-based franchise organizations: Aire Serv, Glass Doctor, Mr. Appliance, Mr. Electric, Rainbow International, The Grounds Guys, and my brand Mr. Rooter. We are an active member of the IFA and the founding company for VetFran. As the largest and oldest franchising trade group, the IFA's mission is to safeguard the business environment for franchising worldwide. IFA protects, enhances and promotes franchising by advancing the values of integrity, respect, trust, commitment to excellence and diversity.

According to a 2012 study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, there are more than 820,000 franchised establishments in the U.S. that are responsible for creating more than 17 million American jobs and generating \$2.1 trillion in economic output. Franchising

operates in a variety of industries; including automotive, commercial and residential services, restaurants, lodging, real estate and business and personal services. One out of every eight private, non-farm jobs in the United States comes from franchising. This is especially true in Texas.

The IFA and its members have long supported the efforts of this Subcommittee and the Department of Veterans Affairs'. For several years, the IFA has maintained an ongoing dialogue with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Center for Veteran Enterprise, seeking ways to improve program outreach to transitioning veterans.

Watching the events of the Gulf War unfold in 1990, the president and founder of my parent company, The Dwyer Group, Don Dwyer Sr., a veteran himself, decided he had to do more for our service men and women. He considered the traditional ways of support, but saw nothing that captured the spirit on the scale he envisioned. A short time later, while attending the IFA's 1991 annual convention, he conceived the ideal solution: help our veterans achieve the American Dream by owning their own franchised small business.

Just before Veterans Day in 1991, the program was officially launched during a press conference in Washington, D.C. and soon, more than 100 franchise systems were participating as partners in the effort, providing financial incentives for honorably-discharged veterans. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the VetFran initiative was reenergized by Dina Dwyer Owens, the CEO and Chairwoman of The Dwyer Group and now boasts more than 600 franchise systems participating offering veterans discounts, incentives to help them in small business ownership and connecting them to jobs throughout the United States as well as the great state of Texas. I am so proud that an initiative started right here in Waco, Texas by The Dwyer Group has had such an impact across our nation.

In November 2011 the First Lady, Michelle Obama, partnered with the IFA to launch Operation Enduring Opportunity. She was looking to the business community to help hire and recruit 100,000 veterans as business owners and team members by 2014. Our franchising community pledged to hire 80,000 veterans. To date, I am so proud to announce that a program first started in Texas by The Dwyer Group and then built throughout the nation as ensured that 151,557 veterans and military spouses have been hired through franchising these past two years. Also 5,192 veterans have come into small business ownership through this program. Veterans looking for opportunities in franchising can begin by logging onto to www.VetFran.com to start their journey. VetFran.com includes a veteran tool kit, information on franchising, and a veterans job bank to help match veterans to employers.

I am pleased to report that since 2002, The Dwyer Group had brought in more than 298 veterans into small business ownership with more than \$1.8 million in discounts awarded to veterans. When Operation Enduring Opportunity was launched we pledged to hire 300 veterans throughout the United States as our promise. To date our franchisees combined with our corporate headquarters have hired more than 624 veterans. Some examples include my

Vice President of Operations, John Mendel, who joined our company late last year after retiring as a Navy Captain. He proudly served in Bahrain and Baghdad. Jason Lee, the newest member of our marketing team joined us this past July after serving in the Army as an E-4. He is our Public Relations Specialist and at this very moment is in Kansas performing his Army Reserve duty.

Franchising and Veterans – a Great Match

Franchising is the great American Dream. It allows people to own a business and teaches them a system to help them be successful. As a franchisee, you have control over what you are doing in your life—you are your own boss. I grew up in a military family and served in the military, we were not an entrepreneurial family, and I did not know how to run a business. However, I wanted that control—to be my own boss—I was successful because I followed the system that the franchise set up.

When I was in the Marine Corps, I became accustomed to following the systems of the military, and it has directly helped me succeed in franchising where systems are the foundation of success. That is why I believe that franchising offers significant advantages over other types of business—particularly for military veterans. As was the case with my experience, we often say that franchising allows you to be in business for yourself, but not by yourself. By choosing franchising, an entrepreneur not only has immediate access to support, training and expertise from the franchisor but is also buying the rights to use a valuable and recognized name brand. Furthermore, the franchisor provides the entrepreneur with a business plan and operations manual that were developed to help guide and direct the successful operation of the business. Combined with ongoing support and teamwork, the franchise business model gives entrepreneurs a solid foundation to be successful and a leg up on the competition.

Franchising is an interdependent relationship in which the franchisor licenses to the franchisee the right to use its trademarks, intellectual property, and business and operating plans in exchange for a fee. The result is a relationship in which both the franchisor, who is able to develop new units more effectively than through corporate ownership, and the franchisee, who is able to operate an independent business backed by the power of a recognized brand and proven operating system, win. This mutually dependent relationship requires the franchisor and the franchisee to collaborate to achieve mutual success, since neither will be successful without the other.

As a proud veteran of the United States Marine Corps, I can attest to the fact that members of our armed forces are disciplined, hard-working, passionate people who have an ingrained trait to work within systems. They are accustomed to following standard operating procedures, which is very similar to franchising which uses manuals, systems and procedures to maintain the integrity of the brand. That is the main reason why former members of the military make excellent candidates for franchise ownership as well as outstanding employees.

It is estimated that in the next five years more than a million service men and women will transition out of the military. These men and women are looking forward to rejoining their families,

going back to school or starting their own business. With the diversity of jobs in the military, veterans reenter civilian life with the skills needed to succeed in franchising whether it's as a small business owner or an employee of a franchisee. Their Military Occupation Specialty, which is the military's way to identify an individual's particular specialty, can help our returning service men and women identify the best franchise system that meets their skills and training.

Helping fellow veterans make the transition to civilian life and realize their dream of small business ownership is one of my passions. In addition to recruiting veterans to Mr. Rooter Plumbing, I am the Director of Veteran Affairs for The Dwyer Group, and from 2010 to 2013 served as the chairwoman of the IFA's VetFran Committee. In this role, I worked with other members of the IFA and VetFran participating companies to encourage more systems to offer veterans discounts and benefits when purchasing a franchise as well as provide employment opportunities for our returning veterans. In that two year period we grew participation in the program by 79% and launched Operation Enduring Opportunity. In addition, I teach the franchising class at the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities hosted by the Center for New Ventures and Entrepreneurship at Texas A&M University.

As we at The Dwyer Group and IFA strive to honor our nation's returning veterans I ask this committee to help pass legislation to aid our veterans' investment in their future. The Help Veterans Own Franchises Act (HVOFA) introduced by Representative Aaron Schock (R-Ill) and Senator Bob Casey (D-Pa.) in the 112th Congress would have provided significant incentives for veterans to own their own franchise business. This legislation establishes a tax credit for franchise businesses offering qualified veterans a discounted initial franchise fee. The tax credit would amount to 50% of the total franchise fee discount offered by the franchisor, capped at \$25,000 per unit, and also provides a tax credit to the veteran for the remaining initial franchise fee paid. Enactment of this tax credit will encourage economic growth and create more jobs. Our veterans deserve this chance after so faithfully serving our country. IFA is engaged with members of Congress to re-introduce the HVOFA in the 113th Congress. Franchising has shown it's commitment to hiring veterans and veterans hire veterans. Let's help get more veterans into small business ownership and provide more jobs here in Texas and our great nation.

Again, on behalf of the International Franchise Association as well as Mr. Rooter Plumbing and the entire Dwyer Group family of brands, we sincerely appreciate the good work of this subcommittee. We strongly urge you to support and help pass the Help Veterans Own Franchises Act, so that more of our veterans may return home to begin building a bright future for themselves, their families and their communities through small business ownership. The members of the IFA look forward to a continued working relationship with this Subcommittee as well as supporting the initiatives underway at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Small Business Administration to assist our returning men and women of the Armed Services.

Thank you and God Bless America.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Ms. Thompson. Well said.
Mr. Amsden, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DAVID AMSDEN

Mr. Amsden. Thank you, sir.

On behalf of Cognizant Technology Solutions, I want to thank the Subcommittee Chairman Flores and Ranking Member Takano for holding the field hearing on veterans hiring, a topic that I hold very close to my heart and in which the company I represent here has made great strides.

On a personal note, I am a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and come from a long line in family members that served in the United States military. I was honored to be an Army officer and follow in the footsteps of both my father and grandfather, each of whom wore the uniform of our country.

For those who may not have heard of Cognizant, we are well known to many of the businesses in your State. We provide information technology solutions, consulting, and business process services to hundreds of companies in the United States.

Our 27,000 employees in the U.S. tend to work for energy companies and at pharmaceutical companies, banking institutions, healthcare payers and providers, manufacturers, retailers, and colleges and universities in the 49 States where we have employees.

Texas is and has been a very important State to our company. It is the third-largest presence in the U.S. for Cognizant, with over 2,000 employees. And to date, our Texas clients include energy, healthcare, financial services companies, in addition to universities. We work and live locally, pay taxes, and patronize local businesses throughout the State. We appreciate the business-friendly environment that the State offers to innovative companies such as ours.

The overall goal of our company is to help our customers build stronger businesses by both running better or driving performance efficiencies and effectiveness and running different or driving growth through innovation and business transformation. But we have an additional goal to give back to our communities in which we live and work. I acknowledge to some that those may just seem like a sound bite.

But I can assure you that this is a creed that has been engrained here in my company, at Cognizant, and makes our business better in every way.

In 2008, our company leadership saw that soldiers arriving back from Iraq and Afghanistan needed support to find employment. This was underscored by a growing number of unemployed veterans.

In response, Cognizant launched a multi-tiered program aimed to helping those veterans get trained and help that they needed to secure job interviews and stable employment situations.

The goals of our Veterans in Technology program, or what we call VIT, are twofold. First, to design and implement initiatives that not just create a military-friendly work environment, but also allow the veterans and their families to assimilate into the private sector. And second, to maintain a disability program that is ADAAA compliant for all disabled employees.

We are currently involved in several different initiatives focused on addressing the issue of veteran unemployment in this country.

Cognizant is working with Virginia Military Institute—of course, my alma mater—to become a member of the military outplacement program and is also connecting with all the military academies, such as West Point, Air Force Academy, Naval Academy, and Coast Guard.

We also entered into a partnership with SAP, another large technology company, to hire recently separated veterans as part of a pilot program. SAP, our partner veterans to work program, should certainly be acknowledged in our national technology economy. They are providing certification to areas to include HANA, ASC, business intelligence, Web intelligence, and the Sybase unwired program—all really, really important programs in our technology platform.

Cognizant is developing a job transition program also, called Public To Private, which we will help veterans with basic job search skills, such as resume writing, interview skills, job searching techniques via the Internet, networking, use of alumni programs, and these are complementary programs that our company has built to help veterans. Several of these programs have already taken place across the country in this past year. We have several more scheduled in the coming months, one of which will be here in Texas.

Cognizant has also partnered with Monster, the Internet site, and will be taking part in the 100,000 Jobs Mission established by JP Morgan Chase and other big-branded organizations that are very passionate about hiring veterans. We have briefed the White House on these initiatives, and they are supportive of our veteran recruitment programs. We will continue to update them as we make progress and grow these efforts.

Although we are pleased with our successes so far, it would be pertinent to highlight a few challenges, both from our perspective and of the veterans.

From the company's perspective, the challenges—and these, I think, are very important that you hear from the field what is going on—are finding that veterans with the right skills, we have a hard time finding veterans with the right skills for our specific jobs and those that have interest in training for highly technical skills and translating veteran resumes into specific job requirements.

From the veterans' perspective, one key challenge that they are not sure how their interests—that they are not sure how their interests, skills, and experience translate into civilian jobs. Frequently, they do not have experience marketing themselves with resumes and interviewing. The veteran and military community is relatively less familiar with my Cognizant brand and other major brands as well. So veterans do not approach Cognizant on their own, and there is a lack of formalized training programs to build and augment technical skills of veteran hires.

We know that we can overcome these challenges, particularly because there is a natural compatibility between Cognizant and the veteran workforce. Those that served in our armed forces now form a workforce that comes with certain key qualities, such as leader-

ship, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and the ability to work under pressure—qualities that both Cognizant and companies we work with value tremendously.

This past year, in 2013, Cognizant added over 100 veterans, and as a company, we currently employ over 200 veterans and growing. The number of veterans hired thus far has been higher than what we originally projected because those hires have proven to be such exceptional employees.

The company is very proud of these accomplishments but knows there is more to be done.

Cognizant's Veterans in Technology program aims to increase veteran hiring in 2013 and 2014 by up to 30 percent year-over-year through continued programming and increased partnerships. Discussions are already underway with Texas A&M and other colleges in the State of Texas and universities that would significantly expand our Veterans in Training program, particularly—also particularly on the west coast.

Our recruiting mission includes building and maintaining a community of employees who have served in the U.S. military, providing opportunities for veterans and their families. We want to help make it possible for them to lead productive, satisfying, prosperous lives, contributing in the private sector after completion of their distinguished military service.

I am extremely proud to work for—for the work that we have been doing with the veteran community. We have created a strong foundation that we can expand upon for years to come.

Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today, to share what Cognizant has been doing to recruit and help retain our Nation's veterans in the private workforce. We are grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, and to all the members of this committee for your attention to the needs of our Nation's veterans.

Thank you very much, and on a last note, wishing everyone a great Veterans Day on Monday.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Amsden]

Testimony of David Amsden
Vice President, Recruiting
Cognizant Technology Solutions
Before the US House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Committee on Veterans Affairs
November 6, 2013
Waco, Texas

On behalf of Cognizant Technology Solutions, I want to thank Subcommittee Chairman Bill Flores and Ranking Member Mark Takano for holding this field hearing on Veterans Hiring, a topic that I hold very close to my heart, and in which the company I represent here has made great strides.

On a personal note, I am a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and come from a long line of family members that served in the United States military. I was honored to be an Army officer and follow in the footsteps of both my father and grandfather, each of whom also wore the uniform of our country.

For those who may not have heard of Cognizant, we are well known to many of the businesses in your state. We provide information technology, consulting, and business process services to hundreds of companies in the U.S.

Our 27,000 employees in the U.S. tend to work for energy companies and at pharmaceutical companies, banking institutions, healthcare payers and providers, manufacturers, retailers, and colleges and universities in the 49 states where we have employees.

Texas is and has been a very important state to the company; it is our 3rd largest presence in the U.S. with over 2,000 employees to date. Our Texas clients include energy, healthcare and financial services companies, in addition to universities. We work and live locally, pay taxes and patronize local businesses throughout the state. We appreciate the business-friendly environment that the state offers to innovative companies such as ours.

The overall goal of our company is to help our customers build stronger businesses, by both running better, or driving performance efficiencies and effectiveness, and running different, or driving growth through innovation and business transformation. But we have an additional goal: to give back to the communities in which we live and work. I acknowledge to some that those words may just seem like a sound bite, but I can assure you, this is a creed that is ingrained in us and makes our business better in every way.

In 2008, our company's leadership saw that soldiers arriving back from Iraq and Afghanistan needed support to find employment. This was underscored by a growing number of unemployed veterans.

In response, Cognizant launched a multi-tiered program aimed at helping those veterans get the training and help they needed to secure job interviews and stable employment situations.

The goals of our Veterans in Technology (VIT) program are two-fold: First, to design and implement initiatives that not just create a military-friendly work environment, but also allow the veterans and their families to assimilate into the private sector. And second, to maintain a disability program that is ADAAA compliant for all disabled employees.

We are currently involved in several different initiatives focused on addressing the issue of veteran unemployment in this country.

Cognizant is working with Virginia Military Institute to become a member of the Military outplacement program and will be connecting with other Military academies such as West Point, Air Force Academy and Coast Guard.

We entered into a Partnership with SAP – another technology company – to hire recently separated veterans as part of a pilot program. SAP's Veterans-to-Work Program provides certification in areas that include HANA, ASE, Business Intelligence, Web intelligence, and the Sybase Unwired Program.

Cognizant is developing a job transition program called "Public to Private," which will help veterans with basic job search skills such as resume writing, interviewing skills, job search via internet, networking and using alumni programs. Several of these programs have already taken place across the country this past year and we have several more scheduled in the coming months.

Cognizant has also partnered with Monster and will be taking part in the “100,000 jobs” mission established by JP Morgan Chase.

We have briefed the White House on these initiatives and they are supportive of our veteran recruitment programs. We will continue to update them as we progress and grow these efforts.

Although we are pleased with our successes so far, it would be pertinent to highlight a few challenges – both from our perspective and from that of the veterans.

From the company’s perspective, the challenges have included: finding the veterans with the right skills or those that have interest in training for the skills; and translating veteran resumes into specific job requirements.

From the veterans’ perspective, the one key challenge is that they are not sure how their interests, skills and experience translate into civilian jobs; frequently they do not have experience marketing themselves with resumes and interviewing. The veteran/military community is relatively less familiar with the Cognizant brand. So veterans do not approach Cognizant on their own. And there is a lack of formalized training programs to build and augment the technical skill sets of veteran hires.

We know that we can overcome these challenges, particularly because there is a natural compatibility between Cognizant and the veteran workforce. Those that served in our armed forces now form a workforce that comes with certain key qualities such as leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to work under pressure; qualities that both Cognizant and the companies we work with value tremendously.

This past year, in 2013, Cognizant added over 100 veterans, and, as a company, we currently employ over 200 veterans and growing. The number of veterans hired thus far has been higher than what we originally projected because those hires have proven to be such exceptional employees.

The company is very proud of these accomplishments but knows that there is more to be done.

Cognizant’s Veterans in Technology program aims to increase Veteran hiring in 2013 and 2014 through continued programming and an increase in partnerships. Discussions are already underway with Texas A&M and other colleges and universities that would significantly expand our Veterans in Training program, particularly on the west coast.

Our recruiting mission includes building and maintaining a community of employees who have served in the US military and providing opportunities for veterans and their families. We want to help make it possible for them to lead productive, satisfying, prosperous lives, contributing in the private sector after completion of their military service.

I am extremely proud of the work we have been doing with the veteran community. We have created a strong foundation that we can expand upon for years to come.

Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today to share some of what Cognizant has been doing to recruit and help our nation’s veterans enter the private workforce. We are grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, and to all of the members of this committee for your attention to the needs of our nation’s veterans.

Biography

David Amsden

Vice President, Recruiting Cognizant Technology Solutions

David Amsden is the leader of Talent Acquisition and serving his 9th year with Cognizant; during the last 9 + years Cognizant has grown from under 5,000 employees to over 165,000 employees. David leads a global team of over 130+ recruiting professionals supporting all functions within Cognizant. He leads hiring across all vertical and horizontal business platforms including H1, H2 and H3, the Future of Work, Campus, Veteran and Diversity programs. David is a distinguished graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and proudly served in the United States Army. David resides in Dover, MA with his three daughters-Alexandra, Katharine and Isabel.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Amsden.

Mr. Burton, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS BURTON

Mr. Burton. Good morning, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and Congressman Williams.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Home Depot about our commitment to veterans, especially in Texas. As the world's largest home improvement retailer, we employ more than 300,000 associates, 35,000 of them veterans, thousands more that are military spouses. And at any given time, we have approximately 1,500 Reservists who are currently serving on active duty while working at the Home Depot.

Since our founding in 1978, the Home Depot's dedication to quality and excellence has been the foundation of our success. We recognize and respect the same spirit of determination in the members of our U.S. military community and seek to support our soldiers and their families in every way possible.

Veterans work in every part of our organization, from the president of our Western Division, who is a former enlisted Marine, to store managers who are logistics and IT professionals, also store employees who are experts in every kind of trade you can imagine.

The Home Depot believes that veterans are one of the most talented applicant pools from which we can recruit. I know this firsthand as a U.S. Marine myself and now store manager of the Home Depot here in Waco, Texas. I came to the Home Depot 26 years ago—my anniversary is actually today—during a 6-year tour as an active duty Marine Reservist. I worked as a sales associate in many, multiple departments and directly benefited from the support of the Home Depot, provided as my unit was activated multiples times to support Operation Desert Storm.

I have had the opportunity throughout my Home Depot career to give back, helping my employees prepare themselves and their families for deployment, especially during the Iraq war—as I was the store manager of the Killeen Home Depot at that time—and current operations in Afghanistan as well. I have also hosted several military job-related fairs.

In the military, men and women gain valuable skills that are transferable to civilian workforces. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to translate those skills into civilian terminology. That is why we

created our new military skills translator available at the homedepotmilitary.com.

The online program allows applicants to enter their service pay grade, their military job title, and translate that to experience in the civilian world and skills. It also allows the applicant to add those items to refined searches to view available jobs available at the Home Depot.

Our newest military-friendly hiring program is an online social network community for job seekers, called the HomeTown, available at the homedepotcommunity.com Web site. Military job seekers can attend live chats, read and comment on military-related topics, participate in webinars, and interact with actual Home Depot employees.

Another way we have engaged veterans is through our civilian career workshops. On October 27, 2012, the Home Depot stores across the country hosted these events, which were designed to help service members and veterans understand how to successfully navigate the transition into the civilian workforce, whether the Home Depot or any other employer that they might be interested in.

These workshops included sessions focused on job search strategies, resume optimization, and interviewing techniques. Throughout the 100-plus workshops, we were able to engage as many as 5,000 participants across the Nation. In Texas, events were held in Selma, Killeen, Lake Worth, El Paso.

We participate in nearly 100 veteran-focused career fairs across the country each year. In partnership with the Recruit Military, our most recent job fairs in Texas were held in San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston.

Finally, we recently committed to the White House's Joining Forces initiative to increase our veterans hiring by 10 percent, or 55,000 new veterans over the next 5 years.

Our commitment to veterans doesn't stop with our hiring efforts. Through the Home Depot Foundation, we have pledged over \$80 million over 5 years to address veterans' housing needs to ensure that every veteran and their family has a safe place to call home.

In addition, through Team Depot, an associate-led volunteer force, our employees are volunteering their time and skills to repair and remodel veterans' homes and facilities. In Texas so far this year, we have invested nearly \$900,000 in grants to renovate more than 100 veterans housing units and complete rehab and repair projects for nonprofit facilities that serve veterans in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and San Antonio.

All of these efforts are possible because we operate businesses that succeed when customers come into our stores to invest in improvements in their own homes. Therefore, we urge Congress to support efforts that promote a strong economy and a strong housing market.

We also encourage the support of the veteran hiring organizations that we are partnered with, such as Operation Career Front, a partnership between the U.S. Department of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, GI Jobs, and the Military Spouse Employment Program.

On behalf of the Home Depot, I am honored to testify today and appreciate you in supporting our Nation's veterans.
Gentlemen, thank you for your service.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Burton]

Witness Testimony of Chris Burton, The Home Depot
House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
oversight field hearing on "Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs
and Employment for Veterans."

November 6, 2013

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of The Home Depot about our commitment to veterans, especially in Texas. As the world's largest home improvement retailer, we employ more than 300,000 associates: 35,000 of them veterans, thousands more that are military spouses, and at any given time have approximately 1,500 reservists who are currently serving on active duty while working at The Home Depot.

Since our founding in 1978, The Home Depot's dedication to quality and excellence has been the foundation of our success. We recognize and respect this same spirit of determination in the members of our U.S. military community and seek to support our soldiers and their families in every way possible.

Veterans work in every part of our organization – from the president of our Western Division, who is a former enlisted Marine, to store managers, logistics and IT professionals, to store employees who are experts in every kind of trade you can imagine. The Home Depot believes that veterans are one of the most talented applicant pools from which you can recruit. I know this first hand as a U.S. Marine veteran and now Store Manager at The Home Depot here in Waco. I came to The Home Depot 27 years ago—my anniversary is actually tomorrow—during a six year tour as an active duty Marine reservist. I worked as a sales associate in the lumber department and directly benefitted from the support Home Depot provided as my unit was activated multiple times to support Operation Desert Storm. I've had the opportunity throughout my Home Depot career to give back by helping my employees prepare themselves and their families for deployment, especially during the Iraq War and our current operation in Afghanistan. I have also hosted several military related job fairs.

In the military, men and women gain valuable skills that are transferable to the civilian workforce. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to translate those skills into civilian terminology. That's why we created our new military skills translator, available at www.homedepotmilitary.com. The online program allows applicants to enter their service, pay grade, and military job title, translates that experience into civilian skills, and allows the applicant to add those items to a refined search to view available jobs at The Home Depot.

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Our commitment to veterans doesn't stop with our hiring efforts. Through The Home Depot Foundation, we have pledged \$80 million over five years to address veterans' housing needs to ensure that every veteran and their family has a safe place to call home. In addition, through Team Depot, our associate-led volunteer force, our employees are volunteering their time and skills to repair and remodel veterans' homes and facilities. In Texas so far this year, we have invested nearly \$900,000 in grants to renovate more than one hundred veterans' housing units and to complete rehab and repair projects for nonprofit facilities that serve veterans in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston and San Antonio.

All of these efforts are possible because we operate a business that succeeds when customers come into our stores to invest in improvements to their homes. Therefore, we urge Congress to support efforts that promote a strong economy and housing market. We also encourage the support of veteran hiring organizations that we are partnered with such as Operation Career Front—a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs—GI Jobs, and the Military Spouse Employment Program.

On behalf of The Home Depot, I am honored to testify today and appreciate your work in supporting our nation's veterans.

Chris Burton is a Store Manager at The Home Depot in Waco, Texas. He has nearly three decades of experience working for the company in various roles from sales associate in the lumber department to working as Store Manager for the last ten years. He has worked in three different Texas markets: Austin, Houston, and Dallas-Fort Worth. Chris came to the Home Depot during a six year tour as an active duty Marine reservist and, after witnessing the support he received from The Home Depot during his service, has worked in various capacities to support Home Depot employees who are veterans. Some examples include supporting his employees as they prepare their families and themselves for deployment especially during both the Iraq war and Afghanistan operation, helping with various military focused job fairs, and facilitating the Killeen

Mission Transition workshop in 2012 to help service members and veterans successfully navigate the transition into the civilian workforce. Chris lives in Waco with his wife and two children.

House Rule XI clause 2(g)(5) statement:

I have not received any federal grants in the past two years.

Chris Burton, The Home Depot

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Burton. Did you say today is your 26th anniversary at—

Mr. Burton. Yes, sir.

Mr. Flores. Well, congratulations.

Mr. Burton. Thank you.

Mr. Flores. Mr. Vizner, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JOHN VIZNER

Mr. Vizner.

Good morning, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and Congressman Williams.

My name is John Vizner. I am the facility manager for Caterpillar's manufacturing plant here in Waco, Texas.

While we have 240 employees at our facility, there are approximately 550 Caterpillar employees here in Waco and more than 3,000 employees across the State of Texas. Caterpillar is headquartered in Illinois, with more than 121,000 employees worldwide.

Personally, I am a proud veteran, having served in the United States Navy for 6 years from 1988 to '94. I completed the Navy's nuclear power program and served 4 years on the USS Jefferson City. After leaving the Navy, I attended Kansas State University, where I received my degree in mechanical engineering.

In '98, I joined Caterpillar as a design engineer and for the past 15 years have held a variety of leadership roles where my military experience really provided those core skills needed for success.

So why veterans? At Caterpillar, we recognize the numerous benefits of hiring military veterans. Veterans are an under tapped employment resource. Their strong work ethics, their values, their skills learned in the military translate well into positions that are available within Caterpillar.

Nationally, Caterpillar supports our active and former military employees through the Caterpillar Armed Forces Support Network, which was launched in May of 2007. The employees resource group has four primary committees—growth, participation, partnership, and troop and family support. The Caterpillar Armed Forces Support Network promotes and supports personal and career development for Caterpillar military veterans through networking and mentoring programs.

To focus on national recruiting initiatives, Caterpillar created a new position in June of this year, a military recruiting manager that is solely dedicated to creating and launching a strategy and standardizing approaches for hiring veterans. This will allow us to share successful practices across the company, as well as provide focus on a few national initiatives, such as the White House Joining Forces initiative, Hiring Our Heroes, American Corporate Partners, and 100,000 Jobs Mission. I would like to take a few moments just to discuss some of these programs.

Hiring Our Heroes, which was a program sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to help veterans and military spouses find meaningful employment by working with the U.S. Chamber's vast network of State and local chambers and other strategic partners. As an active member, Caterpillar has access to a large military talent pool through the more than 530 job fairs across the country.

The next veteran-focused program we support is the 100,000 Jobs Mission. One hundred twenty-two leading U.S. companies launched the 100,000 Jobs Mission in 2011, with the goal of collectively hiring 100,000 transitioning service members and military veterans by 2020.

As a collective group, we conduct career and hiring events, provide resources to transition military members and make them more competitive and expose them to job opportunities. As of September 30th, the companies within this coalition have hired over 92,000 veterans.

Next, we have joined the American Corporate Partners Veterans Mentoring Program, which connects veteran protees with corporate mentors for a yearlong mentorship. Caterpillar has recently become a supporter of this nonprofit organization with varying members of our executive office, including our CEO and chairman, with military members. Over the course of the year, they will meet to discuss things from resume building and interview skills, to networking and small business development.

And finally, the U.S. Army PaYS program, which is a partnership between the U.S. Army and a cross-section of companies in the private sector. Caterpillar uses this program to source talented military personnel.

Most recently, we have used this Army PaYS program to recruit machinists and welders for our Waco facility and will continue to use this program to increase awareness among the military members that Caterpillar is a military-friendly company.

To wrap up, I would like to discuss a few things we are doing here locally in Waco. As I mentioned, we used the Army PaYS to attract welders and machinists. We also participate in the annual Hiring Red, White, and You job fair that happens here in Waco and will take place next week.

Our facility is targeting significant growth over the next several months and would like to leverage the talents of many military veterans that are becoming available. We recently launched a local chapter of the Caterpillar Armed Forces Support Network. This veterans support group is gaining traction quickly, as more of our employees are learning about the benefits this group provides.

Further, we have been engaged with General Don Jones, U.S. Army, Retired, and Crystal Dyer, a U.S. Army veteran, and their efforts with the Warriors to the Workforce initiative. Their focus is to improve the connection between veterans, local colleges and universities, and potential employers. Though this program is in its infancy, the vision of this program will have a positive impact on connecting veterans to future careers.

So, as you can see, Caterpillar recognizes there are numerous benefits of hiring military veterans and spouses. Their strong work ethic, core values, and leadership skills align well to the same val-

ues found in Caterpillar. Caterpillar is committed to hiring our veterans and helping with their transition from the military to the civilian life.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in this hearing on this important subject, and I look forward to questions that you may have.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vizner]

Testimony of

John C. Vizner, Facility Manager

Caterpillar Inc.

House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Hearing on Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans

Introduction

Good morning. Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, thank you for holding this important hearing.

My name is John Vizner, and I am the Facility Manager of the Waco, Texas facility of Caterpillar. While we have over 240 employees in our facility, there are approximately 550 Caterpillar employees in Waco and more than 3,000 employees across the state of Texas. Caterpillar is headquartered in Peoria, IL and employs more than 121,000 employees worldwide and distributes products to more than 180 countries.

In my position, I oversee the manufacturing operations for our Caterpillar Work Tool business unit here in Waco, where we produce three product lines – buckets, couplers, and hydraulic hammers – primarily attachments for our excavator equipment.

Personally, I am a proud veteran – I served in the United States Navy for six years, from 1988 to 1994. I completed the Navy's nuclear power program and was stationed on the USS Jefferson City for four years. After leaving the Navy, I attended Kansas State University where I received my bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

In 1998, I joined Caterpillar as a design engineer. I have held a variety of leadership roles over the past 15 years in which my military experience provided me the core skills needed for success.

Why Veterans?

At Caterpillar, we recognize the numerous benefits to hiring military veterans and spouses. Veterans are an under-tapped employment resource that has great potential to benefit Caterpillar. Military personnel bring a strong work ethic and values that were honed during their service time. Many of those skills that were learned in the military can translate into positions that we have within Caterpillar.

The skills, leadership and values that veterans parallel the same values found in the Caterpillar culture and we want to bring in as many qualified veterans in to work for our company.

Nationally, Caterpillar supports our active and former military employees through the Caterpillar Armed Forces Support Network

(or CAFSN), which launched in May 2007. Through its four principle committees—Troop & Family Support, Partnerships, Participation and Growth—CAFSN promotes and supports personal and career development for Caterpillar military veterans through networking and mentoring programs. CAFSN also is ready to serve those Caterpillar employees and their families during times of reactivation and deployment.

Each of CAFSN's four committees focuses on an important area. The Growth Committee explores opportunities to partner with corporate organizations in order to showcase the experience and knowledge of veterans who are seeking employment with Caterpillar. The Participation Committee encourages the membership to take part in various aspects of CAFSN activities. The Partnership Committee establishes military and community support networks that are able to partner in support of the Armed Forces to meet the critical success factors of the CAFSN. Finally, the Troop & Family Support Committee provides support for Caterpillar Employees called to active duty and their families.

CAFSN's other role is to assist with recruiting and career development of veterans throughout the enterprise and Cat dealers. CAFSN believes that the talents and "can-do" philosophy developed in the military can tremendously benefit Caterpillar worldwide.

National Recruiting Initiatives

In June, Caterpillar created a new position that would be solely dedicated to creating and launching a strategy that would standardize our approach to hiring veterans. A corporate approach would allow us to share successful recruiting practices across division lines and give increased visibility to the issues that are important to our veterans. We have successfully launched a series of initiatives to identify and recruit exceptional military talent. With the creation of a comprehensive military recruiting strategy, our company will be able to focus on the vital few national initiatives, such as the White House Joining Forces Initiative, Hiring Our Heroes, American Corporate Partners and 100,000 Jobs Mission, to attract and develop our nation's military heroes. At this time, I will elaborate on a few of the nationally-focus veteran programs that we currently support, with plans to continue that support throughout 2014.

Hiring Our Heroes

Hiring Our Heroes, which is a program sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, was launched in March 2011 as a nationwide initiative to help veterans and military spouses find meaningful employment. Working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's vast network of state and local chambers and other strategic partners from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, our goal is to create a movement across America in hundreds of communities where veterans and military families return every day. As an active member of this program, Caterpillar has access to a larger military talent pool through more than 530 hiring fairs in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

100,000 Jobs Mission

The next veteran-focused program that our company supports at a corporate level is the 100,000 Jobs Mission. A number of leading U.S. companies launched the 100,000 Jobs Mission in March 2011

with a goal of collectively hiring 100,000 transitioning service-members and military veterans by 2020. As member companies of the coalition, we are committed to helping transitioning service-members and other veterans lead successful lives after their military service. As a collective group, we conduct career and hiring events, as well as provide resources to our transitioning military members to make them more competitive in the private sector and expose them to more job opportunities. As of September 30, the 122 companies comprising the 100,000 Jobs Mission have hired 92,869 veterans and we look forward to seeing that number grow.

American Corporate Partners

The American Corporate Partner's (ACP) Veteran Mentoring Program connects Veteran Proteges with Corporate Mentors for a yearlong mentorship. Caterpillar has recently become a supporter of this non-profit organization and will pair members of our Executive Office, including our Chairman and CEO, and members of our organizational leadership teams with military members who are currently serving or have served our country. Over the course of the year, all Caterpillar mentors and their paired protege will have at least 12 significant discussions, ranging from resume building and interview skills to networking and small business development.

U.S. Army PaYS Program

The Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) Program is a strategic partnership between the U.S. Army and a cross section of companies, and public sector agencies. This unique program is part of the Army's effort to partner with and strengthen relationships America's business community and those who have served in the U.S. Army. Caterpillar uses this program to source talented military personnel that learned skills in the Army that could be used for positions within our company. Most recently, we have used the Army PaYS Program to recruit machinists and welders in the Waco facility, and we will continue to use this program to increase awareness amongst military members that Caterpillar is a military-friendly company that recognizes the value they can bring to our company.

Local Recruiting Initiatives

I wanted to take a few minutes to discuss what we are doing locally, here in Waco. As I mentioned, we are utilizing the Army PaYS program to attract military talent into our welding and machining positions. We also participate in the "Hiring Red, White and You" annual job fair for veterans here in Waco, which will take place next week. Our facilities are targeting significant growth over the next several months and would like to leverage the talents of the many veterans that are becoming available.

We also recently launched our local chapter of the Caterpillar Armed Forces Support Network in Waco 3 months ago. This veteran's support group is gaining traction quickly as more of our employees are learning about the benefits this group provides.

Further, we have been engaged with General Don Jones (U.S. Army retired) and Crystal Dyer (U.S. Army veteran) in their efforts with the Warriors to the Workforce initiative. Their focus is to improve the connection between veterans, local colleges and universities, and potential employers. Though this program is in its in-

fancy, the vision of this program will have a positive effect on connecting veterans to future careers.

Conclusion

As you can see, Caterpillar recognizes that there are numerous benefits to hiring military veterans and spouses. Their strong work ethic, core values and leadership skills, and values parallel the same values found in the Caterpillar culture and we want to bring in as many qualified veterans in to work for our company as possible. Caterpillar is committed to hiring our veterans and helping with their transition from military to civilian life.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in today's hearing on this important subject and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

John C. Vizner, Biography

Caterpillar Inc: 1998 – Present

2010 – Present Facility Manager: Waco, TX

2006 – 2010 Manufacturing Engineering Manager: Wamego, KS

2005 – 2006 Scheduling Supervisor: Wamego, KS

2000 – 2005 Manufacturing Engineer: Wamego, KS

(Lean Manufacturing Coordinator, 6 Sigma Black Belt)

1998 – 2000 Design Engineer, Wamego KS

Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS: 1994 – 1998

BS in Mechanical Engineering with Minor in Economics

U.S. Navy: 1988 – 1994

Machinist Mate: Nuclear Power Program

Current community involvement

* Board of Directors: Waco Chamber of Commerce

* Business Advisory Board: TSTC – Waco, TX (Weld Dept. and MET Dept.)

* National Visiting Committee: National Center for Welding Education & Training

* Business Advisory Board (President): Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Vizner.

Mr. Kopser, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH KOPSER

Mr. Kopser.

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, Congressman Williams, it is an honor to be here today to talk before this committee. As a 20-year Army officer defending the U.S. Constitution, to get to be here today with you all, representing Article I, is really cool.

Yesterday, I had the high honor of being at the White House to also talk about veterans initiatives. So that was Article II of the Constitution. I figured tomorrow if I can argue before the Supreme Court, it will be a perfect week.

Mr. Flores. There you go.

Mr. Kopser. In the interest of time, my colleagues at the table have already done a great job of explaining the values and qualities that veterans bring to the table. I think that is almost a given. And so, in the interest of time, I would like to submit as a written statement my comments before on the record.

I want to go very straight, very quickly to the challenges that veterans have because I just retired in May after 20 years, and so it is still fresh in my mind. I would like to share those experiences.

Congress can stimulate the growth of a new economy and leverage the talents and power of veterans and the resources we have. But in short, the Government would be able to serve its veterans best by giving us better access to capital and by providing us the freedom to be able to succeed. If you can do this, I promise you will not be disappointed in what we could accomplish.

First, despite the great efforts of the VA and DoD over the last 10 years, there is still a huge cliff at the end of time in service before a person transitions on active duty, and there are some very specific things we can do. The 2-week ACAT program 6 months out before the end of service, retirement, or ETS, PCS doesn't work.

If you are going to start a company and you don't necessarily want to just sit in a cubical—because, remember, the last 10 years we have created adrenaline junkies that want to go out and serve their community like they served in Iraq and Afghanistan. We need better access to capital, and we need to understand the language of business and to get into the business of business. And to be able to do that, this next generation of volunteers that become members of the community are going to need to do things differently than I do.

While I was teaching at the University of Texas for my final 2 years in uniform, leading Texas Army ROTC, I had to literally pull a Superman routine where I would change from uniform to civilian clothes in the restroom to leave to go off to events after work, to be able to be a part of the community and understand how business would work now that I have retired.

Our military still frowns—because of our ethos frowns upon the idea of some kind of a conflict of interest at the end of your military career to begin this transition, and we need to change it because it doesn't need to be that hard. We can balance the issues of conflict of interest with being just very clear and giving guidance.

We let these men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan work millions of dollars and the lives of men and women overseas. We can give them the balance that they need to be able to do things a little bit differently.

Without asking for permission, I started auditing a class at the Texas School of Business, the McCombs School of Business, on entrepreneurship. We studied about Iraqi and Afghan culture for years before we deployed, but there is very little formal system to let us understand the business of business.

The second major obstacle is the access to capital. Often what we need is just a little seed funding to get going. As we all know, as you know, military pay won't make you a millionaire. We don't serve for the money. We serve for love of country.

But to get a business off the ground takes seed capital, and I have a few ideas because angel and investment groups are looking for the 19-year-old Dorito bag eating, Red Bull drinking young man or woman. And when they see them, they push money into their pockets.

Not to a 42-year-old dad of 3 daughters living in central Texas. We are not the typical entrepreneur. So we need to do things specifically. Here are some ideas.

For every year of service you have in uniform, why not provide a \$1,000 matching grant for the amount of money that they can either save or find from other investors? Most of the money I started—or found to start my company, RideScout, came from my West Point classmate Craig Cummings. Most of the money I have achieved in the \$1.2 million we have raised over the last 2 years has come from veterans or people who understand veterans. But I am the exception, not the rule. It should be much easier.

We have served for 5 or 10 or 20 years, along the way serving and protecting the American dream of free enterprise. Now it is our turn to participate in the system, and Congress can act to do things to make it easier to change the laws and to help the military ease this ethos, the culture of sliding into service.

At the end of the day, people matter, and that's what we do very well. We want—if you want to help someone in your community with a fundraiser, you find a veteran. You want someone to help speak up at city council, find a veteran. Want someone to partner with to do business, find a veteran.

We make things happen because of three things. We do well in teams. We solve problems. And after being in combat, the most of us, we don't sweat the small stuff.

So I am proud to testify today in front of this legislative body. I am open not only to talk during the question and answer, but hopefully afterwards, not only of my experiences starting this company, RideScout, but those veterans like me who follow behind me.

It shouldn't have to be this hard. We owe it to this next greatest generation, and I appreciate the time to talk this morning.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kopser]

Ride Scout Testimony

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

As a simple Cavalryman from Texas, it is truly an honor to be invited to testify in front of such an esteemed body. Thank you for the opportunity.

Today we are in the midst of, and witness to, an historic change in our veteran community. As the active duty military continues to reduce its numbers in the coming years, hundreds of thousands of military service members, along with their families, will converge on the private sector. It is a crossroads, a challenge, and also an incredible opportunity.

I say a challenge, because there are literally not enough existing cubicles, desks, storefronts or jobsites in this great country to absorb them all. And what's more, after more than 12 years at war, this generation of innovative and eclectic combat veterans will likely not be satisfied by making PowerPoint slides everyday sporting ties or high heels.

But every one of you there on the dais knows well the challenge we face in this arena. What I would like to talk to you about today

is the great opportunity we can realize as a nation if we recognize it and provide our support.

For the last decade we sent our volunteer military abroad in defense of our nation to places like Iraq, Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa—often with a mission and expectations that far exceeded the resources we gave them on the way out the door. But they did not make excuses or come up short on those expectations; they exceeded them.

The professional young men and women of our military merely responded with an entrepreneurial spirit not unlike what our forefathers witnessed after our Revolution when the first patriots turned to the task of building an America worthy of the American Dream.

They responded with a dedication not unlike what we saw when our Veterans were called to heal and rebuild a nation torn apart by a Civil War.

Our nation's veterans have responded throughout history with a spirit and drive that welcomed challenge embraced risk to pursue a better life for their families and their communities.

And the Government has always been a key enabler and reliable partner to our veterans.

When the nation mobilized for World Wars to keep the world safe for democracy. We forged a new generation of leaders in business, government and industry that we proudly called our Greatest Generation because they helped to start a new economy that rebuilt a country that was living in the shadows of the Great Depression and 4 years of war.

And, with the help of a Congress that gave us the GI Bill, we created a first generation of college educated Americans.

Now some of the logic behind incentivizing these vets to attend college was that there were not enough jobs available and higher education gave the economy the time and space to absorb many of them. But far more important, education gave them the skills and confidence they needed to start their own companies and set the conditions for economic growth that fueled an unprecedented six decades of economic growth.

The current generation of veterans shares with those generations that came before them three very important traits.

First, we work well as teams. Regardless of demographic— race, ethnicity, or gender— the military taught us to work with people we didn't previously know—or in some cases relate to or understand.

Second, we solve problems. On the hillsides of Afghanistan or on the roads in Iraq, we learned to solve problems with the resources given without worrying or whining that our higher headquarters did not give us enough.

Last, most of us experienced a post-traumatic growth. As General Casey, former Army Chief of Staff, used to say, "while some of our veterans are experiencing a very real stress from a post-traumatic experience—and they need our help and assistance—the great majority of our veterans returned from combat experiencing a very real, post-traumatic growth. We have a new found sense of confidence. We have a perspective that does not revolve around the petty or trivial. We know that in tight situations, through team-

work and training, we can thrive and survive.” Simply put—we don’t sweat the small stuff.

As was the case with our past generations, a public-private partnership is more than necessary—it is essential. Today’s veterans need a basic education in the business of business, along with introductions to the network of wealth and capital that provide us the resources we need to get started.

I believe Congress can help stimulate the growth of a new economy going forward it to provide the minimum access to education, training and resources needed to start a business. The cumbersome process of the Veteran-owned business concept needs to be revised and streamlined. In short, the government would serve its veterans best by providing access to capital and then give them the freedom to succeed. If you do this, I promise you will not be disappointed with what they accomplish.

I say these things with confidence because I am one of those veterans. And for 20 years I worked with countless professionals who embody the same spirit and commitment.

In creating RideScout, I was on a journey to make life easier for everyday Americans to find the transportation they needed in the hope they could leave their car behind. We waste so much energy everyday sitting in traffic, burning fuel—I got tired of it. I set out to find a web site or mobile App that would show me all my options in one place. I found great sites for buses and some for cabs and even a few carpool sites—but nothing that brought them all together. In Iraq, I was involved in making life better for Iraqis ... Today, I’m proud to be making life better for all Americans. While I think its great that someone invented Angry Birds or SnapChat, I think it is a mark of things to come that our company is designed to make a real impact in improving the lives of people and our planet— and if we happen to make a profit along the way for our investors—there is nothing wrong with that either.

RideScout has found success in large part because I willed it to be and because the culture that I grew up in does not acknowledge failure as an option. But of course I could not have started this company without help. I have spent the last few minutes talking to you about the value of veteran human capital and there is no better proof that I believe what I say than the composition of my team. Four combat vets with over four decades of military service. And when my team needed help to get started—from advisors to sit on our board, to investors, to mentors—I turned to veterans. And they responded as you know they would: they ran to the sound of the guns.

For the last 5, 10 and in some case 20 years, we served our country in support of defending the American dream of free enterprise. Today marks our turn to participate in that dream. And whether you are a for-profit business, a consumer of American goods and services, or a member of Congress, the Veteran is a wise repository in which to invest your time and your money.

People matter.

Want help from someone for the school fundraiser? Find a veteran.

Want someone to stand with you and speak up at City Council on your behalf? Find a veteran.

Want to find a partner to start a business? Find a veteran.

Making it happen ... it's what we do.

I am proud to testify today in front of a legislative body that not only understands the challenge we face but also embraces the opportunity to be a partner with and invest in one of our nation's most important enterprises—the U.S. Military Veteran.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Kopser.

Before we go on, I would like to go off script for a little bit. If we have anybody in the audience that is active military, Reservist, or Guard, would you please stand?

[Nonverbal response.]

Mr. Flores. And then any veterans in the crowd? I know we have got a number of them, including most of the panel here. So please stand.

[Nonverbal response.]

[Applause.]

Mr. Flores. I thank the first panel for their remarks, and I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions.

This is a question for each of you, and I think, Mr. Kopser, you hit on this. So I am going to start with you, if that is all right, and then we will work back this way.

What types of characteristics do veterans have that make them such great employees? I mean, you kind of went through that. Why don't you go through that again for our benefit, if you would?

Mr. Kopser. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, first and foremost, we work well in teams. The beauty of the United States military, because we are a volunteer force, we come from every county, every zip code, and every congressional district in the U.S. You are forced very early on in your military career to work with people you don't like, and then, over time, you learn to like them because you value the contribution of their talents rather than the color of their skin, their ethnicity, or even the way they talk.

That is the first thing we do. We work really well in teams.

Secondly, we solve problems. When we put young men and women into Afghanistan and Iraq, we often put them, sadly, without the resources they should have or deserve to have. But we didn't allow them, and they didn't and we didn't accept excuses as a reason to not accomplish the mission.

Whatever is legal, moral, and ethical, the United States service member and veteran today will get it done, and they will do it in a way that makes not only themselves proud, but it benefits the community. So it is a win-win for all involved. We solve problems.

And thirdly, and this is a real point, there is a lot of discussion about post traumatic stress, or the after-effects of trauma. And while there are a number of people who deserve and need extra attention and care, there is a greater number of veterans who experience what we call post traumatic growth. In other words, after they have been through combat and they have literally had people been shooting at them, and they learned through training to their buddies out safely and to take care of those needs, we come out with a sense of confidence, a sense of purpose, and we are not going back to the old ways of doing business, whether it be in training

in our services today or how we go into communities and solve problems.

That resiliency, that confidence is something that is rare among people, except for some of our first responders, to ever really put themselves in harm's way. So it is teamwork. It is the problem solving, and it is that resiliency that make us great in the civilian community as well as the military.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Kopser.

Mr. Vizner, I would like to ask you all to keep your answers to about a minute.

Mr. Kopser. Sorry.

Mr. Flores. That is okay. I think there is a little bit of passion at that end—well, through the whole table, but particularly on that end of the table.

Mr. Vizner?

Mr. Vizner. To expand on the leadership portion of teamwork, we see our veterans step up on these teams and actually lead teams. From our hourly employees on the shop floor, all the way up through our executive office. So we see that teamwork is well beyond just participating, to really leading the team efforts.

Lastly, accountability is probably one that comes to my mind. We can count on our veterans every single day. The workforce we have entering right now, the younger generation that are not veterans, it is hard just to get them to show up to work every day.

Our veterans are very accountable, and they are there to serve us and to do what they can to be successful within our company.

Mr. Flores. Mr. Burton?

Mr. Burton. Thank you. Thank you.

I think a poster child would be Mr. Kopser here. That would be exactly what I would be looking for when I was looking to bring somebody onto my team.

You know, we look for the same skills that we look for for many of our associates, but a commitment to customer service and a "whatever it takes" philosophy, which you will find in most service people.

You know, obviously, leadership, the ability to critically think, teamwork, empowerment, the ability to make decisions on your own, you know, are something—many of the attributes that many of our service people, servicemen and women, we look for.

And people that embrace, you know, the values that our company were built on and the inclusion and passion for what they are doing. Many of the panel members have already alluded to just the things that are exhibited by most servicemen and women.

Thank you.

Mr. Flores. Mr. Amsden?

Mr. Amsden. Very well said by all. There is only a few things I could add, and that is so we are in a global economy. And any experience that our veterans pick up serving around the world is definitely transferable back to when they come back home.

In terms of understanding cultures, their ability to learn new cultures and translate that into the business workforce is very effective. It helps their colleagues that might not have global experience. So that is one thing.

The other thing is in business today, we don't know what 9-to-5 is. We are not a 9-to-5 workforce anymore. We are in a workforce that has no time barriers, has no time limits. It is just about getting the job done and getting it done well as quickly as possible.

And any of the veterans that we work with, they pick up with this experience of it is a selfless service. It is we are going to work until we get the job done, even if it impacts the family at home. So these are things that you can't necessarily teach just out in the community.

These are skills that these folks, these professionals pick up while they are on active duty or in the Reserves or in the Guards that they do make sacrifice. So, and they do know having time barriers. So that is what today's global workforce is about, and that is what these folks are picking up.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Amsden.

And I am running over time, but I do want to get to Ms. Thompson. You made a suggestion in your testimony about getting Congress to pass the Help Veterans Own Franchise Act. Do you have an idea of the impact that would have had on the Dwyer Group in terms of how many more franchisees you would have been able to offer to veterans? Do you have a feel for that?

Ms. Thompson. I don't have a feel for that, but I will tell you this. As someone who was a business owner, was a franchisee, came into franchising right out of the Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps did not pay a lot, I had to scrimp and save. This tax credit will give the veteran more money for getting them into business faster. It gets them on their feet faster.

It allows them to hire more people faster and to get in their community as quickly as possible. And veterans hire more veterans. You know, when you ask about what do veterans do? Veterans understand commitment.

I have a friend that always says the best thing about a veteran is they can put on their resume—you want to understand commitment—that they were willing to take a bullet for their previous employer. They completely understand that commitment.

Mr. Flores. Okay. Thank you, Ms. Thompson.

Sorry I ran over a little bit on my questioning.

Mr. Takano, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. Takano. Mr. Chairman, could you tell me more about Help Veterans?—Is it referred to our committee and has it been introduced?

Mr. Flores. It has been introduced, but I think it is in Ways and Means.

Ms. Thompson. It was introduced in the 112th Congress, and they didn't get it finished. So we are asking that it be reintroduced in the 113th Congress. And what we—what we want to do, all it does is it offers a tax credit to the veteran for up to 50 percent of their franchise fee. It is capped at \$25,000.

And I would contend that as soon as they hire somebody, what they are paying in payroll taxes will more than offset that \$25,000 tax credit.

Mr. Flores. So I think the jurisdiction is under Ways and Means, but I will work with you so that we can prod that along.

Mr. Takano. Well, it is a very interesting.

Mr. Flores. No, but I want to take action and apologize later about it.

Mr. Takano. That is okay.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Takano. Well, you know, it seems to me that there is a way to synthesize some of the ideas here. Mr. Kopser, your idea of \$1,000 matching for every year, and the idea that people build up educational benefits over time... and also, banking investment potential while in military service are ideas that could be coupled perhaps, to get veterans into franchising.

I am curious. Does this bill also deal with perhaps the educating of the systems? I mean, what I like about franchising is the fact that it is a proven concept. There are already systems, a way to educate veterans toward the tail of their career to go through a sort of mini business school.

Ms. Thompson. The beauty of franchising is that it is systems based. I didn't even know what P&L stood for. I didn't know it stood for profit and loss. But my franchisor taught me that, and they taught me how to understand that, and they taught me how to go in and run the business the way I needed to.

And so, they can step into those systems which they understand and they already appreciate. And once they get into that franchise, they get franchise training. They get ongoing training. They have got support, somebody who is going to go out and work with them and help them get into that.

If I had started my first business by myself, I don't think I could sit here and say I was a successful business woman starting off. No one in my family had ever been an entrepreneur.

I knew I wanted to run my own team. I wanted to lead a team in a common mission. I wanted to be in business. I wanted to settle down in my community. But I needed help, and franchising was a great way to help.

Mr. Takano. I see. The same way you have training wheels to work on a bicycle, franchising as a first business experience maybe a good way to go.

I will tell you where I am coming from as a trustee of the community colleges in California for a number of years. We were toying with trying to set up a franchise center where the community colleges would provide a lot of the coursework. But we would have a one-stop shop where the student could learn about the different business skills and the knowledge you need, but also connect with the specific franchises that were a match for them, and also the financing.

I can imagine something similar if we encouraged a community college or some institution to supply that one-stop shop or that transition for the veteran.

Ms. Thompson. And could you use part of your GI bill? Not all military veterans who come out go right into college, but if they could use that for franchise education to get them into business quicker?

Mr. Takano. That is where I am also going with it, and I also like the idea that they have a little pot of money that they can put toward actually buying the franchise. Or we have ways to help them finance purchase of the franchise.

Ms. Thompson. And with VetFran, the 600 participating franchisors that participate, we offer our best discounts to the veterans coming in because we want them to have working capital as quickly as possible.

Mr. Takano. Well, that is—go ahead. I will let you comment, Mr. Kopser.

Mr. Kopser. Thank you, Congressman.

The two points I hit and I want to reinforce is capital, which we very clearly have identified, but the freedom. And what I mean by the freedom is, whether it be a franchise or a high-tech company like what we are building, the best freedom for a transitioning service member is time.

And laced also to the \$1,000 per year of honorable service in the military would be 1 week of permissive TDY is what we call it in the military, where you are not required to go to your Army job or your military job, but you are still being paid. So it is permissive TDY, temporary duty, where they could either go to a community college model or go to a local university and just audit, just sit in the back of the class—not even for a grade, not even the whole semester—until they got, as you say, the training wheels to go through it.

So it is to give them the flexibility. And that freedom comes with time, as well as the capital in the form of money, a direct grant.

Mr. Takano. Mr. Chairman, I will yield back at this point.

Mr. Flores. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

Mr. Williams, you are recognized for 5 minutes for questions.

Mr. Williams. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And I will be—I want to thank all of you for being here. You are doing a fantastic job.

I will start with you, Ms. Thompson. I am a franchisee. My family has been in the franchise business since 1939, and it is the greatest opportunity for anybody to get into business.

Ms. Thompson. I agree.

Mr. Williams. And I want to let you know I support it very much. I believe incentivizing rather than penalizing.

Ms. Thompson. Amen.

Mr. Williams. And the franchise system does that and seeding and visibility unlimited to the franchisee. So I am very —

Ms. Thompson. It is the great American dream.

Mr. Williams. There is no question about it. And like I say, since 1939, my family has been in it.

And but I also want to emphasize, too, and you have heard support here from my two colleagues, the fact that you bring up about the 50 percent franchise fee tax credit is a huge thing. It converts to cash flow. That is the operating capital for that franchisee.

And I will let you know I will support anything that has anything to do with that because that is the way to help franchisees get their seed capital.

And also just to remind everybody, small business is what we are all talking about, is half the payroll, half the workforce in America is what builds—is totally what builds this country. So I want to tell you, you are on the right path, and I will be more than glad to help you as we go through, too.

Ms. Thompson. On behalf of the veterans and franchising, thank you. It matters. What you are doing really matters, and this could make a big difference to someone going into business 2 years earlier or getting off the ground 3 months faster.

Mr. Williams. I am with you. I get it. So thank you.

And also, Mr. Amsden, thank you for your work today. I found several things you said interesting. You talk about some challenges you had, one of which you thought that vets need a better way to market themselves.

And you know, the truth of the matter is, life is retail. And when you have been in the service, sometimes you don't have that opening to understand that until later. What—and very briefly, what do you think we can do to help these vets market themselves as the great people they are and the great workers they will be and are?

Mr. Amsden. Well, I think you all can look at developing some type of what I would call a shared services model. So whether it is for additional capital, whether it is legal services, where when you are starting a business, you need all types of ancillary services, which any franchisee or any entrepreneur needs to go through. It could be legal. It could be accounting. It could be sales/marketing, whatever.

But now, so building a shared services model to support entrepreneurial growth, if you guys could build something like that, that would be very, very helpful to anyone that is trying to build a business.

Now regarding the specific individuals, the soldiers that are getting out of the service, I think it was very eloquently stated, when these folks are first getting out of the service, it is like a hard and fast stop. They work, work, work, and there is no real serious transition phase for them to get trained or to even give them the period to learn how to interview, go take interviews.

They should be encouraged to partner with private business and go take interviews, learn how to interview, learn how to market their skills. And very importantly, these are professionals that they have often gone around in the world in their service, but their mindset when they get out is often to come home—to come back to Texas, right?

Which I am not trying to push anyone away from Texas. But the reality is, it's a national economy. And one of the things that these folks need to learn is that there are jobs in Seattle. There are jobs in California. There are jobs in Massachusetts. And they need to market themselves not just to Texas, but to our country in the private sector. And that is one of the things they need to learn.

Mr. Williams. We want to work with you on that.

The next thing is to John. Thanks for your service. Appreciate it very much.

Let me go back to Chris real quick. Thanks for what you guys are doing. I found very interesting your translation program, I think that is great, and I think you need to keep that up. And anything we can do to help you with it. Because that is important. Terms can mean a lot of different things to people.

Mr. Burton. Yes, sir.

Mr. Williams. And I want to thank you. I want to thank you for that.

And to John with Caterpillar, you guys do a fantastic job. I picked up on where you said welders are something we need to have. I can show where we have lost a lot of business right here in Texas because we don't have enough welders. And keep those things up.

And the 100,000 goal of employees by 2020, I think I understood that.

Mr. Vizner. That is correct. But we are well beyond that path. I believe there is over 92,000 with 6 to 7 years to go.

Mr. Williams. That is what I heard you say. That is great. And

Mr. Vizner. We could set another milestone, though.

Mr. Williams.—we want to help you get to 200,000, if we can.

And Joseph, you talked about angel investors. We have got a lot of issues right now that we have got to do better to promote angel investors. We need to instead of penalizing them, we need to be able to promote them. Because in many cases, that is the cash flow that these small business owners need to get. I understand that, and I want to help you there.

And capital is the seed. We have got to be able to free up capital and let investors, whether they be private investors, banks, or whatever, be able to loan that capital, be able to let people take risk, and be able to let people get rewarded.

That translates into entrepreneurship, capitalism, and the great American dream. I think we all get that, and I appreciate your words on that, and I think you can count on this group of people here to work for it and help you there.

Mr. Kopser. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. Williams. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

Normally, we don't do this. But I thought this panel was particularly instructive. How many in the audience agree with that? So

[Applause.]

Mr. Flores. Thank you for the first panel. We are going to ask you to be dismissed, and then we will bring up our second panel.

On our second panel, we are going to have Dr. Janet Bagby, with Baylor University; Mrs. Kris Cervantes, with McLennan Community College; Mr. Rob Wolaver, with the Texas State Technical College; and finally, Colonel Gerald Smith, with Texas A&M University.

I would like to thank the second panel for joining us today, and I would like to start with you, Dr. Bagby. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JANET BAGBY

Ms. Bagby.

Good morning.

Thank you, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and Congressman Williams, for the opportunity to address this subcommittee.

It is an honor to come before you and to represent Baylor University. My name is Janet Bagby. I am a faculty member in the School of Education and the VETS coordinator.

On behalf of our president, Judge Kenneth Starr, I welcome you to our campus.

As Judge Starr said in his opening remarks, we have about 100 student veterans attending Baylor. Since Baylor is a private school, the financial benefit provided by the GI bill covers only about one semester of Baylor's tuition. By electing to participate in the Yellow Ribbon program, Baylor has made the financial commitment to support student veterans who choose to attend our university.

While our student veteran enrollment may never match that of public universities, I am extremely proud of the services and support we are providing for those veterans who do attend.

After researching the needs of student veterans on campus, Baylor created the Veteran Educational and Transition Services, VETS, program in the fall of 2012 to support the academic success of student veterans attending our campus. I work closely with our campus VA certifying agent, who assists our student veterans in their certification needs.

Through the VETS program, I serve as an advocate and mentor for student veterans on campus. Undergraduate student veterans during their first semester at Baylor take a 1-hour, 1-credit course to assist in their transition to college and specifically to Baylor. Coming from a highly structured environment of the military to a highly unstructured environment of a university can present challenges for incoming student veterans.

For those veterans who need extra assistance with math classes, the VETS program has partnered with our Air Force ROTC to offer free tutoring by the cadets who are fifth-year engineering majors. We have developed a similar partnership with Army ROTC to provide tutoring for student veterans in other content areas.

Although VETS has existed for only three semesters, we are making a difference and positively impacting the lives of our student veterans. We are tracking their progress and look forward to sharing this data with you in the near future.

Last spring, a Baylor counselor informed me that Armando, a senior philosophy major and an Army veteran, was in difficulty and asked if I could help. During the fall semester, Armando had been sitting on his motorcycle at a traffic light when a car crashed into him. His injuries were so severe that he had to take incompletes in all of his classes and postpone his pending graduation.

In the spring semester, Armando worked with the professors of his six classes to satisfy requirements. However, since he was not formally registered for classes, Armando did not have access to the library or the student athletic facility. He was struggling to complete the required coursework without library resources, and without access to the fitness equipment in the Baylor Health Center, his physical healing suffered as well.

I immediately assumed an advocacy role and shared Armando's story with the provost's office and the assistant vice president for student financial services. Within several days, Armando was enrolled in our VETS course, tuition free, and was granted access to all Baylor facilities. I am happy to report that he was able to complete all his coursework and graduated in May.

The VETS program is currently partnering with Baylor's Career Development Department to develop or adapt career resources to

specifically address the needs of our student veterans. Three years ago, the Veterans of Baylor student organization was chartered with the mission of providing a community for student veterans on campus. I serve as the faculty adviser for Veterans of Baylor.

While Baylor has a long tradition of being military friendly, we are now dedicated to becoming a military-embracing campus by cooperating together for the good of our students. In addition to partnering with our ROTC programs, career development, and our law school, who provides free legal advice for our veterans, we are also connecting with the veterans One-Stop shop downtown Waco and local veterans in the business community.

In conclusion, the VETS program, the Veterans of Baylor student organization, Army ROTC, and Air Force ROTC are cosponsoring a Veterans Day ceremony on November 11th at 5:00 p.m. on campus for the Baylor and the Waco communities.

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, Congressman Williams, this concludes my testimony today, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bagby]

Preparing for Oral Testimony before Congressional Committee
Dr. Janet Bagby09 Baylor University

Opening Statement:

Good morning,

Thank you, Chairman Flores and Ranking member Takano for the opportunity to address the subcommittee this morning. It is an honor to come before you and to represent Baylor University.

My name is Dr. Janet Bagby, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology and the VETS Coordinator. On behalf of our President, Judge Kenneth Starr, I welcome you to our campus.

Testimony:

Currently we have approximately 100 student veterans attending Baylor. I say "approximately" because we cannot identify our student veterans unless they are using VA benefits to pay for their tuition. Beginning in 2015, students will have the opportunity to check a box on the Baylor application if they are veterans. At that point, we will be able to identify all incoming Baylor student veterans not just those using GI benefits. Since Baylor is a private school, the financial benefit provided by the GI Bill covers only about one semester of Baylor's tuition. By electing to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program, Baylor has made the financial commitment to support student veterans who choose to attend our University. While our student veteran enrollment may never match that of public universities, I am extremely proud of the services and support we are providing for those veterans who do attend.

After researching the needs of student veterans on campus, Baylor created the Veteran Educational and Transition Services (VETS) Program in the fall of 2012 to support the academic success of student veterans attending the University. The VETS office, located in the Army ROTC facility, is administratively part of the Paul L. Foster Success Center that focuses on meeting the academic and career needs of all Baylor students. The VETS Program is staffed by LaNette Thompson, the VETS Transition Coach and

an Educational Psychology doctoral student. Ms. Thompson's position has been generously funded by Baylor's Graduate School Dean for the past two years. In addition to my teaching responsibilities in the Educational Psychology Department, I serve as the VETS Coordinator. The Provost's office supports the VETS Program with an annual operating budget. The Baylor Veterans' Coordinator is Ms. Jessica Alford whose full-time responsibilities include assisting our student veterans in their VA certification needs. The VETS Program and the Veterans' Coordinator provide dual support for Baylor's student veterans.

Through the VETS Program, I serve as an advocate and mentor for student veterans on campus. Having loved my experience of being a Baylor faculty member for over 20 years, I have developed a strong passion for serving this special population.

Undergraduate student veterans, during their first semester at Baylor, take a one-hour, for-credit course to assist in their transition to college and specifically to Baylor. This class gives student veterans an opportunity to connect on campus. Coming from a highly structured environment of the military to the highly unstructured environment of a university can present challenges for incoming student veterans. Topics covered in the course include:

- Implementing study strategies
- Utilizing Baylor's technology
- Accessing support systems on campus
- Registering for classes and securing tuition assistance
- Planning a career path
- Receiving free legal assistance through Baylor's Law School

The majority of these sessions are presented by key faculty/administrators who have expertise in these areas and who demonstrate their support by personally addressing the students. One class member, an Army veteran whose husband was just deployed, leaving her to cope alone with four small children while at the same time beginning her college career, has especially appreciated the support that the class provides. As part of the course, student veterans submit a writing sample and receive individual feedback on techniques for improving their writing skills, a practice that is helping them in their other classes. For those student veterans who need extra assistance with math classes, besides options in the Paul L. Foster Success Center, the VETS Program has partnered with Air Force ROTC to offer free tutoring by the AF cadets who are fifth year Engineering majors. We are in the process of developing a similar partnership with Army ROTC to provide tutoring for the student veterans in other content areas.

Although VETS has existed for only three semesters, we are making a difference and positively impacting the lives of our student veterans. Last spring, a Baylor counselor informed me that Armando, a senior Philosophy major and an Army veteran, was in difficulty and asked if I could help. Armando had been sitting on his motorcycle at a traffic light when a car crashed into him. His injuries were so severe that he had to take incompletes in all his classes and postpone his impending graduation. That spring, Armando worked with the professors of his six classes to satisfy requirements. However, since he was not formally registered for classes, Armando did not have access to the library or the student

athletic facility. He was struggling to complete the required coursework without library resources, and without access to the fitness equipment in the Baylor health center, his physical healing suffered as well. I immediately assumed an advocacy role and shared Armando's story with the Provost's office and the Assistant Vice-President for Student Financial Services. Within several days, Armando was enrolled in our VETS course, tuition-free, and was granted access to all Baylor facilities. I am happy to report that he was able to complete all his coursework and graduated in May.

The VETS Program is currently partnering with Baylor's Career Development Department to develop or adapt career resources to specifically address the needs of our student veterans. For example:

Resume/cover letters: Tailoring military language and experience to civilian job market and skills

Interview practice: Customize specific questions veterans might encounter in interview settings

Veteran Mentor Program: Develop a mentoring program where student veterans are paired with successful alumni who are also veterans.

A VETS Advisory Board, composed of key Baylor administrators and community leaders, meets regularly to guide and support the VETS Program.

Three years ago, the Veterans of Baylor student organization was chartered with the mission of providing a community for student veterans on campus. I serve as the faculty advisor for Veterans of Baylor. With cooperation from the Provost's office, we are in the process of identifying Baylor faculty and staff who are veterans or who have immediate family members currently serving in the military.

While Baylor has a long tradition of being "military friendly," we are now dedicated to becoming a "military embracing" campus by cooperating together for the good of our students. For example, the VETS program, the Veterans of Baylor student organization, Army ROTC, and Air Force ROTC are co-sponsoring a Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11th at 5:00 PM on campus for the Baylor and Waco communities.

Conclusion:

Chairman Flores, Ranking member Takano this concludes my testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Dr. Bagby. And thank you for what you did to help Armando out.

Ms. Cervantes, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF KRIS CERVANTES

Ms. Cervantes. Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here.

My name is Kris Cervantes, and I am the veterans specialist at McLennan Community College here in Waco. I am a military spouse. My husband is now finished with the military and works at the VA Center for Excellence.

At MCC, we have a program called RSVP, and it came to their attention that veterans experience higher unemployment rates than the general population. There are lots of causes for this, but

some of the contributing factors, according to the Texas Veterans Commission and the VA Center for Excellence, are lacks in the areas of personal support, up to date work experience and resumes, and also that veterans aren't necessarily willing to just settle for any old job. They want a job that has meaningful purpose.

With that in mind, the RSVP program received funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the MCC Foundation also applied for and received funding from the Texas Veterans Commission to expand their offerings to veterans, and the Connect-A-Vet program was created.

There is a reason that it is called military service. Veterans want to give back to their community. And what Connect-A-Vet does is it addressed all those lacks we mentioned. It creates networks of personal support, allows the opportunity for veterans to update their resumes, and provides meaningful work that makes a difference.

And the way it does that is that if a veteran is referred to Connect-A-Vet, they might come from the TVC, from the One-Stop shop downtown, from me as the education officer at MCC. They would come in and meet with a Connect-A-Vet counselor and be paired with a veteran mentor. And then that veteran is paired with an agency—an area nonprofit that they can volunteer with.

This volunteer work is done while the veteran is adjusting to community life, pursuing needed treatments, and exploring education options. For example, a veteran with an MOS in transportation might be assigned to a local area agency that has a fleet of buses used to transport Head Start children. We have nearly 1,000 in the Waco area alone.

In this way, the veteran's resume is going to be updated. They are going to get a good reference, and they might eventually be able to leverage that into a paid position.

Some other examples might be that somebody with experience in inventory could be matched with Caritas, a local food bank, to help them deal with over 6,000 clients. A veteran who is good with their hands might be assigned to work with Habitat for Humanity.

A veteran who needs to change over to office work but lacks some computer skills would be given some training through Connect-A-Vet and MCC and then perhaps put into an administrative position in a local nonprofit, and thereby, they get some experience on the job so that they can translate that into a position.

According to the National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 28 percent of survey volunteers said their unpaid service helped them obtain jobs. So far—and let me just say this program is in its infancy. We really just started accepting cases in September of this year.

So far, we have already had enrollment in case management of 14 veterans. We have 11 mentors onboard, 9 of whom have completed training. We have already done resource referral for two military dependents. We have placed five veterans in local nonprofit volunteer positions, and we have two veterans who have already had paid employment as an outcome of their connection with this program.

We do have a resource center at the MCC campus, which has a beautiful framed flag from Congressman Flores' office. Thank you.

Mr. Flores. You are welcome.

Ms. Cervantes. Some other Connect-A-Vet services that we will be offering include resume building, resource referrals. Of course, education information and referral, they are free to send veterans to me, and whether the veteran wants to attend MCC or another college, I will be happy to help them connect with what their benefits are.

We have a small business development center on MCC's campus that is award winning and can give them lots of great information about how to start their own business. Career planning, networking opportunities.

Emotional assessment services. One of the main things that this program is meant to address is that feeling of disconnect and sort of culture shock as a person leaves the military and may not have gainful employment already set up. We want to help them fill their days with something meaningful. And of course, we will recognize their service.

McLennan Community College, as a college, has over 100 certificates and degrees which are approved for pursuit with Federal education benefits. And we have partnerships with six Texas public universities as well as Baylor. We have award-winning programs and instructors in a wide variety of fields.

Most of the veterans that we see on campus are combat veterans. They have seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are family members. They have wives, children, husbands, et cetera.

At MCC, last spring, I processed 575 State and Federal claims for veterans and their dependents. So we have a fairly large military population on campus. We have so far this fall already processed 581 claims. So it is ahead of the curve, and we expect those numbers to continue growing.

And that is all. If anybody has any questions, I would be happy. And thank you for the opportunity to speak.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Cervantes]

Connect-a-Vet Project and Other Veterans' Services

RSVP, McLennan Community College and MCC Foundation

Presenter: Kris Cervantes, VA Specialist in the Office of Financial Aid, McLennan Community College

CONNECT-A-VET PROJECT

Over 2.2 million veterans served in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The Department of Labor (DOL) state unemployment rates for these returning veterans is more than 2% higher than the rates from other combat eras and is 29.1% for those aged 18–24. Texas Veteran's Commission (TVC) and the VA Center for Excellence report that lack of personal support, current work experience and meaningful purpose during the first months of transition to civilian life is a contributing factor to these statistics.

Screened and referred by TVC and other organizations, veterans will be placed in volunteer positions with partner non-profit agencies. Participating agencies will sign an updated Memorandum of Understanding that not only secures proper supervision and safety, but will encourage learning opportunities and job placement for the

veterans when possible. RSVP volunteers will provide training and mentor support, all while our veterans provide manpower needed to meet growing demands for social services. This project will assist veterans in adjusting to their community while they, in turn, help build the capacity of the nonprofit organizations. The concept creates a two-fold impact.

Veterans can “make a difference” while they may also be receiving treatment, counseling, attending school, seeking jobs or re-connecting with their families. Resumes will be strengthened and self-value will be increased. TVC reports veterans often face months of uncertainty, plagued with dated work experience, empty days and lack of direction. We will fill that gap with 30 new RSVP volunteers to supervise veterans.

Over 800 HOT RSVP volunteers serve in McLennan, Hill, Bosque, Falls, Freestone and Limestone counties, 15% of them veterans. With the exception of Waco itself, the area is widely rural with a total of 52,500 veterans living in our region. This RSVP is only six miles from the Waco VA Medical Center, 30 miles from the Temple VA Medical Center and 46 miles from Fort Hood’s military installation. For these reasons among others, Waco has been designated by USAA Magazine as the #1 location nationally for military retirement, providing a ready supply of new volunteers.

Some examples of how the project will work: A soldier returns from duty with an MOS in transportation. He might volunteer with our regional community action agency to maintain a fleet of buses used to transport the 1,000 Head Start children in this area. Another veteran has experience in shipping and receiving supplies, a skill that could be utilized by our local food bank in serving 6,000 clients monthly. Maybe a third veteran was in combat for so long that she lost relevant skills, or perhaps she simply has the desire to learn something new. Habitat for Humanity could teach a building trade. A veteran with new physical limitations could obtain office or management experience. The possibilities are endless. Some agencies may wish to hire our heroes and benefit from the tax credits available. At the very least, these veterans have added experience to their resume and begun the process of rejoining their community. With a proven Emotional Assessment Profile pre- and post-test given by trained professionals at MCC, RSVP will be able to document that depression is lessened, self-worth is increased, resources have become more accessible and relationships built. As an added benefit, agencies will have increased their capacity to serve this region.

Participating Agencies:

- * HOT Veterans Coalition (Veterans One Stop)
- * Congressman Bill Flores’ District Office
- * Waco Transit
- * McLennan County Veterans Services
- * Advocacy Center
- * Waco Habitat for Humanity
- * Friends for Life
- * Mission Waco
- * Caritas of Waco
- * Area Agency on Aging/HOTCOG
- * Tarleton University School of Social Work

- * VA Medical Center
- * MCC Mental Health Division
- * MCC Adult Basic Education program
- * San Saba RSVP (Ft. Hood)
- * Meals and Wheels
- * Helpings SNAP Outreach

Grants were provided to RSVP by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The McLennan Foundation later applied for an additional grant through the Texas Veterans Commission, which allowed the RSVP program serving veterans to be greatly expanded. McLennan Community College sponsors RSVP in the Heart of Texas, which is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Texas Department on Aging.

McLENNAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE VETERANS' SERVICES

McLennan Community College offers more than 100 certificate and degree programs which are approved for pursuit using federal and state veterans' education benefits (visit <http://www.mclennan.edu/students/admissions/aprog.html> for a list of programs). We also partner with six state universities and Baylor University to offer transfer programs which allow students to complete a variety of Bachelor, Masters, and Doctoral programs here in Waco.

Veterans are offered exceptional service through all departments of the college, as well as personalized assistance in using federal and state education benefits by the Veterans Specialist within the Office of Financial Aid. MCC is a Servicemembers' Opportunity College which has processed over 580 state and federal VA education claims so far this Fall (2013):

- * 11 students using Reserve education benefits.
- * 25 veterans using the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program.
- * 33 students using VA Vocational Rehabilitation.
- * 35 students using the Montgomery GI Bill.
- * 87 dependents of deceased or 100% disabled veterans, using the Dependents Education Assistance Program.
- * 196 students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- * 63 veterans using Hazlewood alongside another VA benefit.
- * 46 veterans using only the Hazlewood benefit.
- * 24 dependents using the Hazlewood alongside their dependent benefits.
- * 61 dependents using only the Hazlewood benefit.

McLennan Community College's mission is to provide access to excellent workforce and transfer programs, student services, and continuing education that promotes student success including proficiency in identified student learning outcomes, successful course completion, graduation, employment, and transfer to a senior institution. The college engages and strengthens its community through successful educational attainment, strong leadership, sustainability efforts, best practices, community service, and integrity.

MCC is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award the Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Applied Sciences, and Associate of Arts in Teaching degrees. The school was established in 1965 by the citizens of McLennan County. MCC provides equal educational opportunity for all qualified students and does not dis-

criminate on the basis of sex, disability, race, creed or religion, color, age, national origin or any other unlawful factors in its educational program, activities, or employment, as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Total IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 and the Age Discrimination Act of 1978.

FEDERAL GRANT AWARDS ACTIVE FOR FY2014

(Does not include Federal Student Financial Aid)

McLennan Community College

* Small Business Development Center (SBDC); \$105,815 awarded by U.S. Small Business Administration.

* RSVP Continuation Grant; \$62,865 by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

* RSVP Veteran Augmentation Grant; \$10,500 by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

* Adult Basic Education Consortium; \$513,416 plus \$67,891 Federal TANF by U.S. Department of Education.

* TRIO Upward Bound; \$342,068 by U.S. Department of Education.

* TRIO Student Support Services; \$305,051 by U.S. Department of Education.

* Perkins; \$711,119 by U.S. Department of Education.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Ms. Cervantes.

Mr. Wolaver, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROB WOLAVER

Mr. Wolaver. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, Congressman Williams. Thank you for the opportunity for Texas State Technical College to participate today.

My name is Rob Wolaver. I am the executive vice president. I am here today representing Chancellor Mike Reeser, who is out of town at our college's Board of Regents meeting.

TSTC is soon approaching our 50-year anniversary as a 2-year institution of higher education, offering occupationally oriented programs in advanced and emerging technical fields. The core mission of TSTC and our programs is to produce top-quality graduates and to place them in high-demand, high-earning fields.

TSTC is the only State-supported technical college system in the State of Texas. We have locations in Harlingen, Marshall, Sweetwater, Waco, and centers that are located in Abilene, Breckenridge, Brownwood, Hutto, Ingleside, Red Oak, and Richmond.

TSTC system offers 151 associate of applied science degrees and 7 associate of science degrees. We are very proud to have produced 93,000 graduates in our 48-year history.

Currently, there are 611 veterans enrolled across the TSTC system. Those students have the opportunity to participate in a number of financial assistance programs, VRAP, post 9/11 GI bill, the Reserve Educational Assistance Program, Montgomery GI bill, Veterans Assistance Program, Rehabilitation Act, and Hazlewood.

TSTC deploys various strategies specifically targeted providing additional support to veteran students. The military credit crosswalk is a Web-based tool that allows veterans to determine ahead of time potential college credit for training that they have received while in the service.

The Veterans Council, a group of individuals that represent military support services, as well as college staff meet monthly to promote awareness on veterans issues and to explore additional assistance opportunities for veterans. The Veterans Support Center, fully deployed at our Harlingen location and currently in development at the Waco location, provides enhanced intake services, expedited benefits assistance and processing, specialized counseling services and referrals, educational support through coaching and mentoring, social activities, enhanced placement services.

In addition, the college actively conducts expanded recruiting programs at military installations for veterans who are in the process of processing out of services. For instance, in Fort Hood, Congressman Williams.

Customized competency-based curriculum is a pilot project that we have initiated which decouples skills development, a student's skills development from a traditional semester credit-hour format. This format allows a student to demonstrate mastery of real-world job skills at their own pace, expediting their path to a credential and placement in the workforce.

This curriculum is an important and viable option, we believe, for veterans to utilize because it allows them to utilize the skills that they learned in the service and advance through an educational curriculum at an accelerated pace. This program is currently fully deployed in one discipline at our Harlingen location, and we are in the initial rollout stages of this format at our East Williamson County Higher Education Center, which is located in Hutto, in multiple disciplines.

We are very proud that in the past few years, TSTC has seen a 32 percent increase in graduates and a 36 percent increase in placements. TSTC has graduated 134 veterans this past year, and TSTC Waco alone has graduated 279 veterans since 2009.

Texas State Technical College is committed to serving veterans through a number of opportunities—the expansion of support services that we offer to those, the development of new methods of skills assessment allowing a veteran to progress through a training curriculum at an advanced pace, additional customized curriculums that allow for an efficient pathway to employment and credential, and the development of specialized short-term training programs that are targeted directly at those veterans.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Members of Congress, for the opportunity for TSTC to be here today and to serve the veterans of the United States.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wolaver]

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Oversight Field Hearing for the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
"Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans"
Presentation by
Texas State Technical College System
Mr. Rob Wolaver
Executive Vice President, TSTC Waco

Background and History

Texas State Technical College was established in 1965 as the James Connally Technical Institute (JCTI) of Texas A & M University to meet the state's evolving workforce needs. JCTI was located in Central Texas at the former James Connally Air Force Base in Waco. In 1967, JCTI expanded to include a South Texas campus in Harlingen. Additional locations soon followed.

JCTI separated from Texas A&M University in 1969 and became an independent state system with its own nine-member Board of Regents and the name Texas State Technical Institute (TSTI). In 1991, the Texas Legislature elevated the status of TSTI's campuses by designating them as technical colleges with the name Texas State Technical College.

The four independent colleges within the Texas State Technical College System (TSTC) are co-educational, two-year institutions of higher education offering occupationally oriented programs with supporting academic courses for certificates or associate degrees. Emphasis is on advanced and emerging technical programs not commonly offered by public junior colleges with a core focus on placement and earnings outcomes. For 48 years, TSTC has been producing top-quality graduates, who are nationally recognized for their highly specialized, technical capabilities and job-ready skills. TSTC's strong relationship with business and industry ensures that coursework focuses on the regional and statewide needs of Texas' employers and leads to success in the job market.

TSTC is Texas' only state-supported technical college system. Its statutory mission is to provide an articulated and responsive technical education system aimed at identifying and addressing industry needs. These two features make TSTC unique among institutions of higher education. The TSTC System currently has campuses in Waco, Harlingen, Marshall and West Texas, with locations in Abilene, Breckenridge, Brownwood and Sweetwater. The System also has extension centers in Hutto, Ingleside, Red Oak and Richmond, in addition to partnerships with many of the state's public junior colleges.

Accolades

TSTC's colleges consistently rank as top producers of associate degrees in engineering, precision production, computer information systems, computer & information sciences, and enrollment of Hispanic students. In Community College Week's annual report titled "Top 100 Associate Degree Producers," TSTC has ranked number one in Texas numerous times in one or more categories and has consistently stayed among the top 50 colleges in the nation in nearly every applicable category.

In the 2012 report, TSTC Waco ranked number one in Texas for graduating the most students in the categories of precision production, engineering technologies/engineering-related fields, and computer & information sciences & support services. In both 2012 and 2013, the college ranked third in the nation for conferring engineering-related associate degrees.

TSTC offers more than 151 Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees and certificates and has produced more than 93,570 graduates in its 48-year history. TSTC Harlingen also offers seven Associate of Science (AS) degrees in biology, computer science, engi-

neering, mathematics, physics, nursing preparatory and health professions.

Since 2009, the TSTC System has generated a 32 percent increase in graduates and a 36 percent increase in job placements. The combined first-year earnings of TSTC graduates are projected to surpass \$55 million in new salaries for Texas – a 54 percent increase over the last four years.

Demographics

TSTC students across the System are a diverse group demographically. They are 65.7 percent minority (56.91 percent Hispanic, 8.60 percent black, 0.19 percent other minorities) and 34.3 percent white. The student body is comprised of 39.83 percent females and 60.17 percent males. Students come from 200 of Texas' 254 counties, and nearly 63 percent are economically disadvantaged.

Veterans at TSTC

TSTC is proud to have many veterans of the armed services among its graduates. Since 2010, TSTC Waco alone has graduated 279 veterans. Roger Hinojosa, from Brownwood, Texas, served in the United States Army as a combat medic prior to attending TSTC Waco. Roger completed his Associate of Applied Science degree in Avionics and is currently working for L3 Communications as an avionics cable assembly technician. Travis Beach, from Chester, New York, served in the United States Army as a generator mechanic. Travis completed his Associate of Applied Science degree in Aviation Maintenance, also from TSTC Waco, and is currently working for L3 Communications as a night shift supervisor for the Manufacturing Division.

> TSTC System – Competency-Based Education, A New Approach to Workplace Readiness

Central to TSTC's efforts to assist veterans in their transition into the workplace is a new initiative intended to shorten the time necessary to earn an award. The new competency-based education model, however, does not sacrifice the quality of skills learned. TSTC began offering this competency-based approach in the fall of 2013 at two locations. The model aligns particularly well with the needs of veterans, displaced workers and career-focused high school graduates.

TSTC Harlingen has implemented the first competency-based certificate in Industrial Systems Technology, part of the growing field of Mechatronics. This prototype decouples skills development from semester credit hours and is recognized as being among the first competency-based certificates in Texas by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

TSTC's multi-institution teaching center in Hutto, the East Williamson County Higher Education Center (EWCHEC), has implemented competency-based instructional delivery across multiple certificate and degree programs. The primary emphasis is on skills mastery. Lecture materials are delivered online, and class time is focused on applied learning in state-of-the-art labs where students work both individually and in teams. Students are routinely assessed for their ability to demonstrate competency in skills which are linked to courses within a semester.

Competency-based programming is designed to allow a student to demonstrate mastery of real-world job skills at his or her own pace. In this way, a student will not spend unnecessary “seat time” in classes reviewing information he or she already knows, either through past job experience or through military service. As a result, a two-year welding degree can now be completed in as few as four semesters – saving time and money while minimizing a student’s deferred wages. Competency programming also ensures that the student learns and masters each required skill, rather than simply earning an average score for a semester-long course.

> TSTC Waco – Veterans Enrichment Efforts

Although TSTC’s smaller locations work with state and community organizations to provide services to assist veterans, the larger campuses have implemented a number of special programs for veterans. For the sake of brevity and this Congressional Field Hearing, the services and programs listed below are specific to TSTC Waco.

- Veterans’ Council – Created in the spring of 2011, the Veterans’ Council meets monthly on the TSTC Waco campus in order to bring awareness to activities, issues and/or challenges that pertain to veteran students. The council is comprised of TSTC staff, faculty, students and representatives from several community support organizations. The council also coordinates an annual Veterans’ Day Appreciation Luncheon for students, faculty and staff who are veterans. The 2013 luncheon will be held November 7th at the Student Recreation Center on campus.

- Credit Crosswalk – Developed through a grant in 2010, the Credit Crosswalk provides veterans a tool to determine if college credit can be awarded for their military training. The Crosswalk compares military occupations to TSTC’s coursework and is used to determine if military training is transferrable to TSTC. The Crosswalk is available online at <http://www.waco.tstc.edu/veterans/militaryoccupations>, an efficient tool available at the fingertips of any veteran searching for the right place to continue his education.

- Targeted Recruiting at Fort Hood in Killeen – TSTC Waco’s staff and faculty regularly make targeted recruiting trips to Fort Hood, located nearby in the Central Texas area. Hundreds of people transition from military assignments to civilian life each month from this installation. Recruiters attend transition events, along with job and career fairs. TSTC Waco’s information is disseminated to interested persons and help is offered to veterans who wish to begin the enrollment process. Also, Fort Hood personnel are regularly apprised of the opportunities for veterans at TSTC Waco.

- Veterans’ Support Services Center – A Wagner-Peyser grant proposal is currently under consideration within the Texas Governor’s Office. Although TSTC Waco traditionally enrolls a significant population of veteran students, the college’s success in retaining and placing veteran students needs improvement. During the 2012 – 2013 academic year, 571 veterans attended TSTC Waco, about 13 percent of the student population. Historically, however, many of them leave without earning a certificate or degree (see addendum). The college currently has only one full-time staff member devoted to the needs of veteran students. The Wagner-Peyser funding will launch a Veterans’ Support Services Center with the goal

of improving TSTC Waco's ability to recruit, enroll, retain and graduate veteran students into high-demand occupations.

TSTC Waco's Veterans' Support Services Center will be located within the Division of Student Development and will provide the following services:

- Expanded recruiting efforts, especially at Fort Hood which is located approximately one hour south of campus (In fiscal year 2013, approximately 11,000 soldiers will exit the service from Fort Hood.)
- Enhanced intake assistance, including review of military training transcripts and TSTC Waco program recommendations and including the use of Credit Crosswalk software to review military transcripts for college credit
- Expedited benefits assistance, processing and validation
- Social services support and referrals
- Specialized counseling support and referrals (PTSD, social adjustment, etc.)
- Educational support (coaching, mentoring, tutoring, etc.)
- Enhanced placement assistance

The project will utilize strategies from the Texas Workforce Commission's College Credit for Heroes, along with the Credit Crosswalk developed at TSTC Waco, to ensure that military training can be applied to a technical training program.

TSTC Harlingen recently created a similar full-service Veterans' Center, serving approximately 200 veteran students. Services offered include benefit assistance, referrals for support services, scholarships, tutoring, academic advisement and veterans' event coordination with outside service agencies. The college is also actively involved in the College Credit for Heroes Scholarship Program.

Conclusion

Without exception, the colleges within the TSTC System are committed to serving U.S. military veterans. That commitment has led to the creation of a Veterans' Service Center on one campus and to the development of plans for another. TSTC is also committed to finding innovative educational pathways for the efficient and cost-effective transition of veterans into the workplace. The competency-based learning prototype is but one such pathway. As part of Texas' Skilled Workforce Initiative, the prototype is intended for statewide implementation and is geared toward assisting veterans wanting to maximize military training and earn a college credential. With the competency-based learning model in place and access to the Credit Crosswalk, veterans attending TSTC will be able to make the most of their military training as they successfully transition into the civilian workforce.

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Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Wolaver.

Colonel Smith, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF COLONEL GERALD "JERRY" L. SMITH

Colonel Smith. Yes, sir. Chairman Flores and distinguished subcommittee members, as I look down the line to my colleagues here, I don't have a fancy slide presentation, but I can offer you a good, old-fashioned Texas A&M howdy.

Mr. Flores. Howdy back.

Colonel Smith. My name is Gerald Smith, and I have had the privilege to serve as the Director of the Texas A&M Veteran Resource and Support Center, or VRSC, for the last year. I retired as a Colonel with 30 years of experience in the U.S. Marine Corps when I opened the doors of our VRSC last year.

First, I would like to thank you for this opportunity. Texas A&M deeply values the service and sacrifice of our veterans and their families, and we also value your support of our veterans. Given our rich military history, A&M is committed to supporting our over 650 student veterans with a unique, dual-office partnership.

The first office is our Financial Aid Veteran Services Office. It is a direct extension of our original Aggie Veteran Office that opened in 1946. They offer streamlined military educational benefit processing, and they also award veterans scholarships.

To better serve well those who have served, we opened our VRSC last year, and we now perform all of the other functions outside of those financial aid functions to identify and provide uniquely tailored resources to our military-affiliated students. Our two offices now together support veterans from application to vocation.

Initially, our office focused on facilitating student veteran transitions, and we launched our Aggie Veteran Network to connect students with existing resources. Next year, we will take this network and we will link it to our new Association of Former Students Veteran and Military Constituent Network. In the future, they will connect current student veterans to one of the largest and most active former student organizations in the country to promote countless employment and other opportunities.

Back in 2008, our Mays School of Business introduced the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities, or EBV, following the original program that started in 2007 at Syracuse University. It offers experiential training in entrepreneurship and small business management to veterans who are disabled as a result of service since 9/11, and it is entirely free to qualifying veterans.

Two-thirds of our participants have started and continue to grow a business through the EBV. Along with Syracuse and Texas A&M, it has also been adopted by six other universities across the country.

Now within weeks of opening our VRSC, we immediately partnered with our career center on campus. Our first cosponsored event was called Boots to Business Suits, where we brought in corporate leaders to discuss the skills valued in veterans, job search techniques, and other employer assistance.

What we found is frequently we get prospective employers would contact their office or our office to talk about veteran employment, and we didn't always give them the full package. We now have a very systematic plan to make sure both offices are included in the discussion to better serve prospective employers and students.

We have also started collecting security clearance information in our student veterans so that we can use the previous clearances to help connect them with Federal agency opportunities out there, and that has paid us a lot of dividends on the employment with Federal agencies.

In August, we held our first Aggie Veteran Camp. It is an in-depth orientation for new student veterans, and typically, these kind of orientations focus on the short-term transition challenges. But we took a broader, longer-term perspective. We brought in the career center to immediately stress the importance of connecting with employment resources from the time they first start their college experience.

Our career center also continues to develop other veteran-specific programs. They have two dedicated student veteran advisers, both with military experience. They have updated their post graduation survey to track veteran employment better. Their database flags both recruiters and student veterans.

They specifically market existing programs for veteran students. In the last year, they have had over 350 student veteran advising contacts and 400 interviews on campus. Since August, they have had over 200 student veterans access their online recruiting system.

Some of our other veteran employment initiatives are going to include next February, we are going to host Operation Vet Success, which will be Texas A&M's first annual national student veteran career fair. We also work with local Texas workforce and TVC by referring students to these offices, and we invite them on campus to meet with students. We use social media to advertise, and we even provide them with the office space. And we have had representatives from the Texas Veterans Leadership Program also come to campus and provide one-on-one campus resume reviews.

We assist in part-time employment for student veterans, and we recently reorganized our Student Veteran Association. We had a student veteran employment liaison officer to facilitate employment for other members of the SVA. Future programs that we are going to start will include student veteran family programs to assist in numerous areas, including spouse employment and scholarships.

Now our new office is just beginning to develop some of these programs to serve veterans like James Rowin, who is with me today. In his 10 years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, he went to Iraq three times and later deployed to the Horn of Africa in a civilian capacity.

His wife is a U.S. Army Reserve officer. They are both Aggie student veterans who exemplify another generation of great Americans who have earned and deserve our support. Our VRSC is determined to help develop innovative best practices to enhance the future success of our student veterans.

Thank you again for this opportunity for myself and Texas A&M to assist you in your efforts. God bless, and gig 'em.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Smith]

Written Testimony of
Colonel Gerald L. Smith, (USMC) Ret.
Director, Veteran Resource & Support Center, Texas A&M University
Before the
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee
on Veterans' Affairs

Field Hearing on “Texas’ Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans”

November 6, 2013

Chairman Flores and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, my name is Gerald Smith and I have the privilege of serving as Director of the new Veteran Resource & Support Center at Texas A&M University. In addition, I am a retired Colonel with 30 years of service in the US Marine Corps.

I want to begin by thanking you for the chance to come before you today to present testimony on important issues relating to supporting veteran employment. At Texas A&M, we deeply value the sacrifice and service of veterans and their families. We appreciate this committee’s actions to investigate and focus on innovative ways to support meaningful employment for our service men and women after they leave the military.

Today, Texas A&M remains committed to building upon our rich military history. Since 1876, Texas A&M has produced thousands of commissioned officers and has eight Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. No university in the nation (other than the service academies) has contributed more to military service than Texas A&M. In our Post 9–11 world, Texas A&M is undeniably veteran friendly; hence the large number of active duty personnel and veterans on campus. Currently, the veteran enrollment is approximately 650 students as Texas A&M continues to support veterans by enhancing their future employment opportunities through higher education.

Through a unique and powerful “dual office partnership,” Texas A&M offers numerous programs and resources that benefit veterans. We now have two offices designed specifically to support veterans. The Scholarships and Financial Aid Veteran Service Office (VSO) is the direct extension of the original Veterans Advisory Office that opened in 1946. To better “serve well those who have served,” we opened the Veteran Resource and Support Center (VRSC) in 2012. Together, these offices provide a robust capability that truly supports our Aggie veterans from “application to vocation.”

The VSO offers streamlined processing of all federal and state educational benefits, deferred tuition pending Veterans Administration (VA) funds, veteran new student orientation, faculty and staff mentor training and cross campus referrals that reach campus wide. The VSO also identifies and awards scholarships for veterans. We are a partner school with the Pat Tillman Foundation and currently have recipients on campus that benefit from that scholarship. Recent procedural improvements in the VSO have significantly improved military educational benefit processing to ensure the best possible financial support for both veterans and military dependents.

The mission of the VRSC is to constantly enhance Texas A&M’s “military friendly” legacy by identifying, developing and providing uniquely tailored resources & programs to students that are: Veterans, Active Duty, Reserve or National Guard, military dependents, survivors and families in order to enrich their holistic development and overall academic success. By embracing the “applica-

tion to vocation” mindset, we support veteran recruiting and college/career transitions by leveraging our Aggie Core Values to “Serve Well Those Who Have Served!”

The VRSC vision is to become “the Texas A&M System Model University” and improve our national ranking to truly become the university known for personal, all-inclusive support to Aggie Veterans and their families. As a highly visible institutional single point of contact (“one-stop referral shop”), the VRSC finds new avenues to maximize both TAMU and external resources to ensure world class academic and transition support that prepares Aggie Vets for future leadership in a global society. In short, as the focal point of Aggie Veteran collaboration and support, we foster a new sense of Aggie tradition to “Serve Well Those Who Have Served!”

Using these mission and vision statements as a guide, the VRSC has developed and implemented a variety of new programs that enhance veteran recognition, improve health service access, increase academic support, connects students with local community resources, and identifies employment opportunities (both full and part time). The VRSC was designed to ensure that Texas A&M continues to improve the quality of support as our student veteran population increases.

The VRSC recently launched the Aggie Veteran Network (AVN). It is designed to connect Aggie student vets, dependents, military families, and veteran faculty/staff with each other and with external organizations. The mission of the AVN is twofold: First, to connect those who are providing, or are willing to provide, resources and support to our students. The second part of the AVN mission is to link our military affiliated students with high-impact opportunities to support each other and the local community. In the next year, the AVN will link with the new Association of Former Student Aggie Veteran & Military Constituent Network. As these programs grow, they will become a foundational and innovative method to effectively link and network current student veterans with one of the largest and most active former student organizations in the country to promote countless internship and employment opportunities.

In 2008, the Mays School of Business at Texas A&M University introduced the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) which followed on the heels of a successful program launch at Syracuse University in 2007. At Texas A&M, EBV is a collaboration between the Center for New Ventures and Entrepreneurship, and the Center for Executive Development and Mays Business School. The EBV initiative offers cutting edge, experiential training in entrepreneurship and small business management to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines disabled as a result of their service supporting operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The intent of the program is to open the door to entrepreneurial opportunity for these men and women, developing their competencies in the many steps and activities associated with creating and sustaining an entrepreneurial venture. Importantly, the program is offered entirely free to qualifying veterans.

EBV has been a tremendously successful program for our veterans, specifically highlighting the role that entrepreneurship may play as a means through which our veterans with disabilities can

take meaningful steps toward independence. Recent survey data highlighted that 66% of the Texas A&M EBV participants (for the five year period) had started and continued to grow a business. Of these respondents, 87% still had a business in operation at the time they took the survey. Participant comments included the following:

? "I have no words that can describe the effect this program has made on me. Life-changing is the closest I can think of. Dr. Lester, Ashley Crane, and Jennifer Cutler deserve great praise for the time and effort spent on the program."

? "Hands-down one of the best experiences of my life."

Along with Syracuse University and Texas A&M University the program was also adopted by Florida State University, U.C.L.A., Purdue University, University of Connecticut, LSU, and Cornell.

In the first year, the Texas A&M VRSC also started numerous other initiatives to fulfill the "application to vocation" mission to better support our student veterans (see Attachment A for the complete summary). Many of the VRSC new programs are focused on facilitating the veteran transition from the military environment to the college campus. These efforts included extensive partnerships, workshops, programs, and events that are focused on academic success and ultimately, meaningful employment after graduation.

To provide an immediate positive impact on the student veteran transition and initial academic success, the VRSC developed a series of initiatives in the new "Aggie Vet Connect Program" (see Attachment B for details). As "non-traditional students," many of our veterans were unaware of existing campus and community resources. Aggie Vet Connect was designed to proactively provide student veterans with information about available resources. The elements of Aggie Vet Connect include: New student conference presentations; Vet Camp; Faculty/Staff and Academic Advisor engagement opportunities and student veteran awareness presentations and panels; recreational sports/wounded warrior engagement; Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Training/Programs; and special events to promote veteran engagement with traditional students. As the VRSC prepares for the second year, the initial success of the Aggie Vet Connect Programs dictates that these programs will increase in both size and scope.

Within weeks of opening, the VRSC established a new partnership with the Texas A&M Career Center. With the Career Center's dedicated focus on student veteran employment, this partnership has continued to strengthen and grow over the past year. This partnership has produced a number of effective events and programs to include:

* One of the first events co-sponsored by these offices was the "Boots to Business Suits" program. The Career Center invited corporate leaders to discuss the skills valued in veterans, how veterans can be successful in the job search process, how employers assist veterans in making the successful transition into their organizations, and how veterans can continue to further their careers. As a result of the very positive response from student veteran attendees, this type of event will be repeated in the future.

* Throughout the year, numerous corporations and federal agencies contact either the VRSC or the Career Center to specifically

discuss veteran internship and future employment opportunities. Our offices have developed a systematic plan to ensure that both the Career Center and VRSC staffs are represented at these meetings. This partnership allows both offices to better serve both prospective employers and our student veterans. Additionally, the VRSC now confidentially collects information about security clearances previously (or currently) held by student veterans. We are rapidly learning how to use this information to better “connect” students with clearances to federal agencies and corporations that require security clearances for future employment.

* In August 2013, the VRSC held the first “Vet Camp” to provide an in-depth orientation for new student veterans prior to the first day of classes. The typical “best practices” for this type of orientation tend to focus only on the immediate “transition to college” challenges. The Texas A&M VRSC and Career Center took a slightly different approach; we included topics and information that incorporated a longer-term perspective. The Career Center provided three presenters to stress the importance of “connecting” with their office and employment resources early in their college experience to facilitate future employment.

In addition to partnership activities with the VRSC, the Career Center continues to develop and expand their own veteran specific programs. They have designated two staff members, both of whom have military experience, to advise student veterans. They added veteran specific questions to their post-graduation survey to track veteran outcomes. In their employment system database, they added a flag to tag those recruiters interested in veteran students and they also added a flag for veteran students to facilitate easier notification of veteran students about employment opportunities. They have included student veterans on panels during annual Recruiter Training and during Advisory Council meetings. They have marketed existing programs, including a National Security Panel, specifically to veteran students.

In the past year, the staff of the Texas A&M Career Center had more than 350 advising contacts with student veterans. In addition, student veterans had more than 400 interviews on campus through the Texas A&M Career Center last year. Finally, more than 200 student veterans have accessed their online recruiting system, “HireAggies,” since the beginning of the fall 2013 semester.

In February 2014, the Student Government Vice President for Veterans Affairs will host OPERATION VET SUCCESS; the 1st Annual Texas A&M Student Veteran Career Fair. The mission of this event is to improve or build student veterans career preparation skills through the use of a national career fair, workshops, and keynote speakers by providing the opportunity to network with national veteran support organizations and veterans enrolled in higher education from across the country. The Texas A&M Career Center has been instrumental in the development of this event.

The VRSC has established close ties with the local office of both the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Veterans Commission. We frequently refer students to these offices for employment and other assistance. Periodically, the VRSC has invited both TVC and TWC employees to campus to meet with students. The VRSC used social media to advertise the “office hours” and provided office

space for these meetings. Representatives from the Texas Veterans Leadership Program have used a similar arrangement to provide “one-on-one” resume reviews.

The VRSC has partnered with several university departments to explore unique academic, recruiting and employment support. The History Department (through funding by the Texas A&M Association of Former Students) is currently teaching a “Veteran Only” History class to provide student veterans with the opportunity to connect with each other in an academic environment. The VRSC has partnered with Mays Business School and the Construction Science Department to proactively recruit more veterans to their programs. As the Aggie Veteran Network expands, the VRSC will seek additional partnerships to assist with recruiting and employment support for our student veterans. We are only just now beginning to understand the potential impact that can be realized through our networking and partnerships.

In addition to full time employment assistance, the VRSC also provides student veterans with numerous part time employment opportunities that provide financial support while enrolled in classes. The VRSC maintains lists of local businesses (and other campus departments) that are actively seeking to hire veterans. These employment opportunities are advertised through the student veteran social media channels. The VRSC and the VSO also employ approximately 8 VA work study students on a part time basis to support the activities of both offices.

As the Director of the VRSC, one of my roles is to serve as the co-advisor for the Student Veteran Association (SVA) at Texas A&M. In early 2013, we helped to facilitate the expansion and reorganization of the SVA. The leadership structure was expanded from five to 22 students. One of the new leadership positions is the Student Veteran Employment Liaison Officer. This position is designed to serve as a way for a student SVA leader to help collect information (i.e., job leads), advertise and facilitate employment for other SVA members.

As the VRSC develops new programs for the second year, it is now evident that a student veteran spouse group or network is in high demand. We are currently working with the SVA leaders to determine the structure and focus for this effort. Although the final details are still under development, it will include aspects of family support and resources to include childcare, medical and dental services, marriage enrichment, financial planning, housing, and spouse employment.

In August 2013, Texas A&M welcomed our new “VetSuccess” on Campus (VSOC) VA counselor. This VA funded position provides our students with direct access to the VA. As we develop future plans, we are working to determine the most efficient ways to employ this added resource. Although not directly related to future employment, the VSOC counselor (in a short two months) has already proven to be a superb advocate for our student veterans as she enhances the student’s abilities to receive timely and appropriate VA support. In turn, this helps them focus on their current mission: Academic Success!

In summary, the Texas A&M VRSC is a very new office that is just beginning to explore and fully develop programs to better serve

student veterans like James Rowin whom I brought with me today. In his 10 years in the US Marine Corps Reserve, he deployed to Iraq three times and later deployed to the Horn of Africa in a civilian capacity. His wife is a US Army Reserve Officer. Both James and his wife are student veterans at Texas A&M. The Rowin's exemplify another generation of great Americans who have earned and deserve our support. As our office grows, we are determined to proactively combine and leverage our networks, programs and resources to develop innovative best practices that enhance the development of our student veterans who have been, and remain, dedicated to serving the greater good.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity for me and Texas A&M to support the efforts to improve programs that directly assist veterans in finding meaningful employment following the completion of their studies.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Colonel Smith. Thank all of the panel for their testimony.

I am now going to recognize myself for 5 minutes. This is a question for everyone on the panel, and we will start with you, Dr. Bagby.

The question is this, and that is what recommendations do each of your institutions have for Congress to help you better assist the veterans that are part of your communities? So, Dr. Bagby?

Ms. Bagby. Thank you.

Mr. Flores. And if you could, if you could keep your question to a little over a minute, that would be great.

Ms. Bagby. I have three recommendations to share with you. One, we find that the \$1,000 a year for 24 credits book allowance oftentimes does not cover the cost of the books. So if there is any way that you could increase.

Our students take at least 12 hours a semester, and many times they are also taking courses in the summer as well. So the \$1,000 certainly does not cover the cost of those textbooks.

A second issue that we are facing is with the BAH. Right now in Texas, in Waco, the veterans get almost \$1,100 a month, which certainly covers housing allowance living in Waco. But we encourage our vets to do internships, and oftentimes, those internships are in cities that are much more costly to live. We have students who go into nursing, and our campus in Dallas, the cost of living is much more.

So there could be any stipulation for the VAH when our students are temporarily leaving our campus or permanently, as in going to the nursing school, if it could be adjusted to that particular city's housing allowance.

The third recommendation is regarding the Fry Scholarship. The Fry Scholarship is for those dependents whose parents was killed in action. Currently, the way we understand the legislation, a student who is going to school using the Fry Scholarship is not eligible to participate in the Yellow Ribbon program. So, in a sense, they are penalized.

And at Baylor, as I mentioned in my testimony, the GI bill covers about one semester at Baylor. So those would be my three recommendations.

Mr. Flores. Thank you.

Ms. Cervantes?

Ms. Cervantes. I would say she covered all the GI bill things that I could have thought of beautifully. VRAP, the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, is currently scheduled to end in April of 2014, but there are several bills coming up that may extend it. And if it does happen, there are some changes I think that would make it more accessible to its target audience, which would be right now there is a full-time requirement, and a lot of the folks that we see coming in have been out of school for 20 years.

I mean, and it is just a major culture shock to have them come in and be expected to be full-time students. We see quite a lot of classes get dropped by these students as they make that adjustment.

Another thing that would help with VRAP is if those students were allowed to do the veterans work study. Currently, they are not eligible for it, and they are in the program specifically because they are unemployed. And so, it would be very helpful for them to have the opportunity to work as work studies at the Texas Veterans Commission, the VA hospital, or even at the schools, if there are positions available.

Mr. Flores. Okay. Mr. Wolaver?

Mr. Wolaver. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I would recommend that we look at the funding mechanisms that veterans have to pay for for training in college and try to explore some avenues for flexibility.

I mentioned our competency-based program, the pilot project. Most of those funding models that veterans have access to are based on traditional semester credit formats, and we are trying to be creative and enhance those opportunities and allow students, whether they be veterans or not, but specifically veterans, to maybe start at an advanced place, rather than a starting point in a training curriculum and to work at their own pace and utilize the skills that they have developed while they are in the military toward a credential and us being able to place them in gainful employment.

And the funding mechanisms don't always work well with non-traditional sort of curriculum formats.

Mr. Flores. Colonel Smith?

Colonel Smith. I would concur with the VAH and the work study comments prior. The other one that I would add is priority registration. I saw a list probably 6 or 8 months ago of a lot of national universities that do have priority registration for their student veterans, and a lot of them are in California. And I have been told, but I can't confirm, that it is a State law out there.

If we can do this for our athletes at nearly every school, we should be able to do it for our veterans. And with the way the GI bill is set up, they need to get in and be on a certain degree plan in order to get those benefits, and we are not making enough progress there.

Thank you.

Mr. Flores. Those are helpful comments.

I will now recognize Ranking Member Takano for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. Takano. Ny questions are along the lines you have mentioned, Colonel Smith. In California, I do have a background in

community colleges, and particularly at the hearings yesterday, priority registration was one of the things we highlighted. Along with a veterans club, the college district actually allocates \$400,000 a year for its 1,200 veteran student population—with the resource center—to actually try to assist veterans.

My question for all of you is, is there a variance, as you have noticed, between the success rate of your nonveteran student population and your veteran population? Just quickly go on down the line, starting with Ms. Bagby.

Ms. Bagby. No. I don't—I am hesitating because I want to be thoughtful with my answer.

Mr. Takano. You only have 100 veterans here, right?

Ms. Bagby. We do. And—

Mr. Takano. So it is kind of a small sample.

Ms. Bagby. It is a small sample. What we are seeing is that there are not necessarily inherent challenges with those veterans coming to Baylor. But they are a population that is the exception at Baylor because they are older. They have had life experiences that many of our traditional student population have not had.

Mr. Takano. Yes. Mindful of the time, I just want to sort of quickly move to the public institutions.

Ms. Cervantes?

Ms. Cervantes. I would—I don't have numbers in front of me, but I would say that, generally speaking, the veterans tend to be successful. We are an open enrollment school, and so I think that most of the time when veterans show up at the door, they are good at planning ahead. They are used to having a mission and accomplishing it.

And so, generally speaking, the ones that I don't see are the ones that I don't see are the ones who come in, get everything started. So I see them that one time. And then they are off. They are off and running, and they do well and they finish.

And either they transfer on to another institution, since we are a community college, or they complete their degree, and they are out the door. The ones that I see are the ones in my office a lot are the ones who are a little more lost.

But I do think that is a small subset. Generally speaking, I think they do well.

Mr. Takano. Great. Mr. Wolaver?

Mr. Wolaver. Our students do persist, the veterans do persist at a better rate than our nonveteran students. But it is still not to a level of satisfaction that we are pleased with at all.

Colonel Smith. We are just trying to get our arms around some of the measurement terms for these nontraditional students. My sense is that their academic success and GPA is very consistent with traditional students. We are still—we are working with our Texas A&M system and other schools to develop better measurements and metrics for this population.

Mr. Takano. Tell me a little more about your entrepreneurship bootcamp for veterans. You say it is completely paid for, no cost to the veteran. Tell me more about the financial support that you have generated.

Colonel Smith. Yes, on the financial support, I know there are some grants and some other support through Texas A&M. I would

have to get back to you on the specifics. This is not my program. It is run through the Mays Business School, and it started well before I came back to start opening the center.

It is about a 2-year process. It is 9 days during the bootcamp, but there is a period of time before the bootcamp where they get mentoring and training, and then there is a year follow-on after they finish the actual bootcamp itself. So it is a pretty lengthy process for them.

Mr. Takano. Do you know how many students have gone through the program?

Colonel Smith. We have had 95 go through, sir.

Mr. Takano. And what types of businesses have they opened up? They tend to be the kind of—well, you probably don't know.

Colonel Smith. Well, I have had the opportunity the last few years to set—there are about 20 to 25 students each year, and they are all over the vocational map, if you will. It is everything from small ventures with water rides down off Galveston Beach to more along the lines of some of the businesses that we were talking about earlier today.

Mr. Takano. Perhaps I can connect with whoever is running that program to find out more about what they are doing.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Flores. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

I could tell you the EBV program is funded in a couple of ways. Mays Business School puts up some nontaxpayer dollars, and then they reach in the pockets of private citizens, private venture, because Gina and I have contributed to that program. Got to be a speaker at two of the classes, and it is a great program.

Mr. Takano. Well, I will talk to you more about it.

Mr. Flores. Yes. So, Mr. Williams, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. Williams. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And the purpose of my remarks will be basically to encourage all of you. You are doing a fantastic job, all of you, and I appreciate it greatly.

Real quick, Dr. Bagby, one of the questions I have is are you—do you also focus on getting these men and women into—for an advanced degree or graduate school, too? I mean, is that something that you help them with or —

Ms. Bagby. Yes. If that is of interest to them. In fact, the president of our Veterans of Baylor student organization is graduating in December, and she has already been accepted at NYU to do a master's in public relations.

Mr. Williams. Well, that is great.

Ms. Bagby. So we are really proud of her.

Mr. Williams. You should be. That is great. Well, thanks for your work you are doing.

Ms. Cervantes, you mentioned just briefly, I just want to reinforce how important it is about how you work in helping start their own businesses. That is so important because that converts to unemployment and employment and so forth, and I would just encourage you to keep doing that. That is what we need most of all right now.

So thank you for that.

And Mr. Wolaver, you are doing a great job. I am familiar with everything that you all are doing and so forth, and I just would like to reinforce that we do a lot of—as I tell people, we do really great in graduating lawyers and business people and so forth. But sometimes we come short on some of the graduates that you are putting out.

And we have about 100,000 kids a year dropping out of school in Texas at the ninth grade level because they don't see any hope or whatever. And with the programs you are generating by helping these veterans get onboard, I can see the veterans beginning to help these 100,000 kids, help employ people. They will start their own businesses. They will begin to realize the dream again.

So you have got a huge opportunity, which you are taking advantage of, and responsibility, frankly, for the future of our country, and I want to say thanks. Very important.

Mr. Wolaver. Thank you, Congressman, for the recognition.

Mr. Williams. You bet.

And then, Colonel Smith, thanks for what you are doing. And of course, in my world, you hit some key buzz words. And marketing is important and how can these young men and women market themselves is important because I have found that veterans that I deal with, they don't talk about their service. They are humble. And sometimes there has got to be a way to let them be able to talk about it because it is big to an employer that they know that.

So I want to thank you for helping there, and business ownership is, again, what we talked about is so important. And I like your priority authorization ideas. I think that is something that needs to happen. You put it in perspective. And so, I think we are all in support of that.

But that is basically all I want to say. You are doing a great job, and you really have the future of our country in your hands, and we appreciate it, and we want to help to the extent that we can. And you have great ideas that we can be involved with you. So thank you, and God bless you.

I yield back.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

And thank the second panel for your testimony. If there is any supplemental information you would like to submit in response to any of our questions, please do that within 5 days. We will incorporate that with our record, into the record, and also with potential activities that the subcommittee may take in the future.

[The attachment appears]

Written Testimony of

Colonel Gerald L. Smith, (USMC) Ret.

Director, Veteran Resource & Support Center, Texas A&M University

Before the

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Field Hearing on "Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans"

November 6, 2013

Chairman Flores and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on

Veterans' Affairs, my name is Gerald Smith and I have the privilege of serving as Director of the new Veteran Resource & Support Center at Texas A&M University. In addition, I am a retired Colonel with 30 years of service in the US Marine Corps.

I want to begin by thanking you for the chance to come before you today to present testimony on important issues relating to supporting veteran employment. At Texas A&M, we deeply value the sacrifice and service of veterans and their families. We appreciate this committee's actions to investigate and focus on innovative ways to support meaningful employment for our service men and women after they leave the military.

Today, Texas A&M remains committed to building upon our rich military history. Since 1876, Texas A&M has produced thousands of commissioned officers and has eight Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. No university in the nation (other than the service academies) has contributed more to military service than Texas A&M. In our Post 9–11 world, Texas A&M is undeniably veteran friendly; hence the large number of active duty personnel and veterans on campus. Currently, the veteran enrollment is approximately 650 students as Texas A&M continues to support veterans by enhancing their future employment opportunities through higher education.

Through a unique and powerful "dual office partnership," Texas A&M offers numerous programs and resources that benefit veterans. We now have two offices designed specifically to support veterans. The Scholarships and Financial Aid Veteran Service Office (VSO) is the direct extension of the original Veterans Advisory Office that opened in 1946. To better "serve well those who have served," we opened the Veteran Resource and Support Center (VRSC) in 2012. Together, these offices provide a robust capability that truly supports our Aggie veterans from "application to vocation."

The VSO offers streamlined processing of all federal and state educational benefits, deferred tuition pending Veterans Administration (VA) funds, veteran new student orientation, faculty and staff mentor training and cross campus referrals that reach campus wide. The VSO also identifies and awards scholarships for veterans. We are a partner school with the Pat Tillman Foundation and currently have recipients on campus that benefit from that scholarship. Recent procedural improvements in the VSO have significantly improved military educational benefit processing to ensure the best possible financial support for both veterans and military dependents.

The mission of the VRSC is to constantly enhance Texas A&M's "military friendly" legacy by identifying, developing and providing uniquely tailored resources & programs to students that are: Veterans, Active Duty, Reserve or National Guard, military dependents, survivors and families in order to enrich their holistic development and overall academic success. By embracing the "application to vocation" mindset, we support veteran recruiting and college/career transitions by leveraging our Aggie Core Values to "Serve Well Those Who Have Served!"

The VRSC vision is to become "the Texas A&M System Model University" and improve our national ranking to truly become the

university known for personal, all-inclusive support to Aggie Veterans and their families. As a highly visible institutional single point of contact (“one-stop referral shop”), the VRSC finds new avenues to maximize both TAMU and external resources to ensure world class academic and transition support that prepares Aggie Vets for future leadership in a global society. In short, as the focal point of Aggie Veteran collaboration and support, we foster a new sense of Aggie tradition to “Serve Well Those Who Have Served!”

Using these mission and vision statements as a guide, the VRSC has developed and implemented a variety of new programs that enhance veteran recognition, improve health service access, increase academic support, connects students with local community resources, and identifies employment opportunities (both full and part time). The VRSC was designed to ensure that Texas A&M continues to improve the quality of support as our student veteran population increases.

The VRSC recently launched the Aggie Veteran Network (AVN). It is designed to connect Aggie student vets, dependents, military families, and veteran faculty/staff with each other and with external organizations. The mission of the AVN is twofold: First, to connect those who are providing, or are willing to provide, resources and support to our students. The second part of the AVN mission is to link our military affiliated students with high-impact opportunities to support each other and the local community. In the next year, the AVN will link with the new Association of Former Student Aggie Veteran & Military Constituent Network. As these programs grow, they will become a foundational and innovative method to effectively link and network current student veterans with one of the largest and most active former student organizations in the country to promote countless internship and employment opportunities.

In 2008, the Mays School of Business at Texas A&M University introduced the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) which followed on the heels of a successful program launch at Syracuse University in 2007. At Texas A&M, EBV is a collaboration between the Center for New Ventures and Entrepreneurship, and the Center for Executive Development and Mays Business School. The EBV initiative offers cutting edge, experiential training in entrepreneurship and small business management to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines disabled as a result of their service supporting operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The intent of the program is to open the door to entrepreneurial opportunity for these men and women, developing their competencies in the many steps and activities associated with creating and sustaining an entrepreneurial venture. Importantly, the program is offered entirely free to qualifying veterans.

EBV has been a tremendously successful program for our veterans, specifically highlighting the role that entrepreneurship may play as a means through which our veterans with disabilities can take meaningful steps toward independence. Recent survey data highlighted that 66% of the Texas A&M EBV participants (for the five year period) had started and continued to grow a business. Of these respondents, 87% still had a business in operation at the

time they took the survey. Participant comments included the following:

? "I have no words that can describe the effect this program has made on me. Life-changing is the closest I can think of. Dr. Lester, Ashley Crane, and Jennifer Cutler deserve great praise for the time and effort spent on the program."

? "Hands-down one of the best experiences of my life."

Along with Syracuse University and Texas A&M University the program was also adopted by Florida State University, U.C.L.A., Purdue University, University of Connecticut, LSU, and Cornell.

In the first year, the Texas A&M VRSC also started numerous other initiatives to fulfill the "application to vocation" mission to better support our student veterans (see Attachment A for the complete summary). Many of the VRSC new programs are focused on facilitating the veteran transition from the military environment to the college campus. These efforts included extensive partnerships, workshops, programs, and events that are focused on academic success and ultimately, meaningful employment after graduation.

To provide an immediate positive impact on the student veteran transition and initial academic success, the VRSC developed a series of initiatives in the new "Aggie Vet Connect Program" (see Attachment B for details). As "non-traditional students," many of our veterans were unaware of existing campus and community resources. Aggie Vet Connect was designed to proactively provide student veterans with information about available resources. The elements of Aggie Vet Connect include: New student conference presentations; Vet Camp; Faculty/Staff and Academic Advisor engagement opportunities and student veteran awareness presentations and panels; recreational sports/wounded warrior engagement; Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Training/Programs; and special events to promote veteran engagement with traditional students. As the VRSC prepares for the second year, the initial success of the Aggie Vet Connect Programs dictates that these programs will increase in both size and scope.

Within weeks of opening, the VRSC established a new partnership with the Texas A&M Career Center. With the Career Center's dedicated focus on student veteran employment, this partnership has continued to strengthen and grow over the past year. This partnership has produced a number of effective events and programs to include:

* One of the first events co-sponsored by these offices was the "Boots to Business Suits" program. The Career Center invited corporate leaders to discuss the skills valued in veterans, how veterans can be successful in the job search process, how employers assist veterans in making the successful transition into their organizations, and how veterans can continue to further their careers. As a result of the very positive response from student veteran attendees, this type of event will be repeated in the future.

* Throughout the year, numerous corporations and federal agencies contact either the VRSC or the Career Center to specifically discuss veteran internship and future employment opportunities. Our offices have developed a systematic plan to ensure that both the Career Center and VRSC staffs are represented at these meetings. This partnership allows both offices to better serve both pro-

spective employers and our student veterans. Additionally, the VRSC now confidentially collects information about security clearances previously (or currently) held by student veterans. We are rapidly learning how to use this information to better “connect” students with clearances to federal agencies and corporations that require security clearances for future employment.

* In August 2013, the VRSC held the first “Vet Camp” to provide an in-depth orientation for new student veterans prior to the first day of classes. The typical “best practices” for this type of orientation tend to focus only on the immediate “transition to college” challenges. The Texas A&M VRSC and Career Center took a slightly different approach; we included topics and information that incorporated a longer-term perspective. The Career Center provided three presenters to stress the importance of “connecting” with their office and employment resources early in their college experience to facilitate future employment.

In addition to partnership activities with the VRSC, the Career Center continues to develop and expand their own veteran specific programs. They have designated two staff members, both of whom have military experience, to advise student veterans. They added veteran specific questions to their post-graduation survey to track veteran outcomes. In their employment system database, they added a flag to tag those recruiters interested in veteran students and they also added a flag for veteran students to facilitate easier notification of veteran students about employment opportunities. They have included student veterans on panels during annual Recruiter Training and during Advisory Council meetings. They have marketed existing programs, including a National Security Panel, specifically to veteran students.

In the past year, the staff of the Texas A&M Career Center had more than 350 advising contacts with student veterans. In addition, student veterans had more than 400 interviews on campus through the Texas A&M Career Center last year. Finally, more than 200 student veterans have accessed their online recruiting system, “HireAggies,” since the beginning of the fall 2013 semester.

In February 2014, the Student Government Vice President for Veterans Affairs will host OPERATION VET SUCCESS; the 1st Annual Texas A&M Student Veteran Career Fair. The mission of this event is to improve or build student veterans career preparation skills through the use of a national career fair, workshops, and keynote speakers by providing the opportunity to network with national veteran support organizations and veterans enrolled in higher education from across the country. The Texas A&M Career Center has been instrumental in the development of this event.

The VRSC has established close ties with the local office of both the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Veterans Commission. We frequently refer students to these offices for employment and other assistance. Periodically, the VRSC has invited both TVC and TWC employees to campus to meet with students. The VRSC used social media to advertise the “office hours” and provided office space for these meetings. Representatives from the Texas Veterans Leadership Program have used a similar arrangement to provide “one-on-one” resume reviews.

The VRSC has partnered with several university departments to explore unique academic, recruiting and employment support. The History Department (through funding by the Texas A&M Association of Former Students) is currently teaching a “Veteran Only” History class to provide student veterans with the opportunity to connect with each other in an academic environment. The VRSC has partnered with Mays Business School and the Construction Science Department to proactively recruit more veterans to their programs. As the Aggie Veteran Network expands, the VRSC will seek additional partnerships to assist with recruiting and employment support for our student veterans. We are only just now beginning to understand the potential impact that can be realized through our networking and partnerships.

In addition to full time employment assistance, the VRSC also provides student veterans with numerous part time employment opportunities that provide financial support while enrolled in classes. The VRSC maintains lists of local businesses (and other campus departments) that are actively seeking to hire veterans. These employment opportunities are advertised through the student veteran social media channels. The VRSC and the VSO also employ approximately 8 VA work study students on a part time basis to support the activities of both offices.

As the Director of the VRSC, one of my roles is to serve as the co-advisor for the Student Veteran Association (SVA) at Texas A&M. In early 2013, we helped to facilitate the expansion and reorganization of the SVA. The leadership structure was expanded from five to 22 students. One of the new leadership positions is the Student Veteran Employment Liaison Officer. This position is designed to serve as a way for a student SVA leader to help collect information (i.e., job leads), advertise and facilitate employment for other SVA members.

As the VRSC develops new programs for the second year, it is now evident that a student veteran spouse group or network is in high demand. We are currently working with the SVA leaders to determine the structure and focus for this effort. Although the final details are still under development, it will include aspects of family support and resources to include childcare, medical and dental services, marriage enrichment, financial planning, housing, and spouse employment.

In August 2013, Texas A&M welcomed our new “VetSuccess” on Campus (VSOC) VA counselor. This VA funded position provides our students with direct access to the VA. As we develop future plans, we are working to determine the most efficient ways to employ this added resource. Although not directly related to future employment, the VSOC counselor (in a short two months) has already proven to be a superb advocate for our student veterans as she enhances the student’s abilities to receive timely and appropriate VA support. In turn, this helps them focus on their current mission: Academic Success!

In summary, the Texas A&M VRSC is a very new office that is just beginning to explore and fully develop programs to better serve student veterans like James Rowin whom I brought with me today. In his 10 years in the US Marine Corps Reserve, he deployed to Iraq three times and later deployed to the Horn of Africa in a civil-

ian capacity. His wife is a US Army Reserve Officer. Both James and his wife are student veterans at Texas A&M. The Rowin's exemplify another generation of great Americans who have earned and deserve our support. As our office grows, we are determined to proactively combine and leverage our networks, programs and resources to develop innovative best practices that enhance the development of our student veterans who have been, and remain, dedicated to serving the greater good.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity for me and Texas A&M to support the efforts to improve programs that directly assist veterans in finding meaningful employment following the completion of their studies.

Mr. Flores. So you are now dismissed. We will change panels. Some of us on the dais may leave for a couple of minutes, and then we will come back and get ready for the third panel.

[Recess.]

Mr. Flores. I would like to recognize the third panel and continue with our hearing this morning. The third panel consists of Chairman Andres Alcantar, with the Texas Workforce Commission, and Mr. Shawn Deabay, with the Texas Veterans Commission.

Each of you will be recognized for 5 minutes, and we will begin with Chairman Alcantar. I would like to remind everybody the green light means that the timer has started. The yellow light means you have a minute left, and the red light means that you need to wrap up pretty quickly.

So, Chairman Alcantar, let us start with you.

STATEMENT OF ANDRES ALCANTAR

Mr. Alcantar. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and Congressman Williams.

I am Andres Alcantar, chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony and appear before this committee.

The Texas Workforce Commission partners with 28 local boards, including Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas that serves the Waco area, and fellow State agencies, such as the Texas Veterans Commission, to provide a broad range of employment, job training, and related services to our veterans. All veterans walking through the doors at our Workforce Solutions offices across the State receive priority of service across employment and support service programs.

These programs include the Employment Services Program, Workforce Investment Act, TANF, SNAP, child care, and other support services. This priority of service extends to TWC's work in Texas.com, the State's largest database for job matching and with a 2-day hold for veterans on all postings to ensure veterans receive first viewing and the opportunity for applying.

We are also a partner in Texas' dedicated Web site, the Texas Veterans Portal, where veterans, family members, and survivors can find helpful information from across a number of governmental agencies.

To demonstrate our commitment to assisting veterans, let me take a few minutes to highlight a handful of programs at TWC. First, and happening next week, TWC, in partnership with our

boards and TVC will host in 27 cities across the State the Hiring Red, White, and You veterans jobs fairs on November 14th. Last year's initial event of the Hiring Red, White, and You campaign attracted 12,000 veterans, 1,400 employers statewide, and resulted in approximately 2,800 veterans being hired by participating employers. We hope to exceed those numbers this year.

Military veterans possess the skills, discipline, and leadership that employers are looking for. The Hiring Red, White, and You effort connects veterans with employers in order to help these individuals successfully transition to civilian life through employment.

Another exciting program we have developed in Texas is College Credit for Heroes. Established by the 82nd Texas legislature with the support of Governor Perry and members of the legislature, the College Credit for Heroes initiative aims to maximize the amount of college credit that our veterans receive for their prior military training and occupational experience, reducing the amount of time that a veteran has to spend in the classroom. That is at the heart of this effort.

In July 2001, TWC and the Higher Ed Coordinating Board began working on this initiative with seven community colleges in Texas. Central Texas College developed an integral part of the effort, a Web-based application for veterans and service members to receive college credit for this prior military training and education.

Veterans using this application are receiving an average of 25 college credits per evaluation, equivalent to almost a year of college. As of October 1, 2013, the Web site has received over 30,000 visits and has 17,000 veteran and service member account holders and have requested almost 2,000 evaluations for college credits.

Recently, the program was expanded to include six new partner schools. In addition, four of the originating institutions were awarded additional funding to continue developing innovative programs.

Just last month, the Texas A&M system and all the universities operating under this system joined the program and signed agreements committing to review all the transcript evaluations used to award college credit to veterans and service members for their prior training. We now have 30 colleges and universities participating in this initiative.

Texas has a high concentration of veterans, an estimated 1.7 million, and was 1 of 4 States selected to develop a national model for partnering with the Army and the workforce system to address unemployment. The State of Texas Soldier Employment Initiative was developed to find new ways to outreach and provide access to jobs and reemployment service for our veterans.

In June 2002, the Texas Workforce Commission was awarded the grant. We are working hard to reduce the amount of time it takes for our veterans to reconnect and make a successful transition.

In closing, I want to recognize the commitment of our 28 local boards to serve our veterans, all of which make our veterans a priority population that they serve, including here through the Heart of Texas Workforce Solutions. Workforce Solutions in central Texas, for example, has a business resource center jointly developed with the Central Texas College, Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce,

and has worked hard to develop small and start-up business opportunities for our veterans.

Another example is in the Upper Rio Grande where our local board there is partnering with Fort Bliss. The Texas Workforce Commission recognizes that the State of Texas can lead the way for the Nation in assisting veterans. This is an ongoing effort that requires many partners, and it is a key component of how we do business.

These men and women have served our country, and we are proud of them and recognize the service they and their families have made. Our veterans have real-world experience and the education that are needed by employers, employers that are working hard to create opportunities all across many industries that we have in this State.

And our veterans will be a key to continuing the success that we have been able to generate. And it has allowed Texas to be the best place to live, to work, and to do business.

Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to testify before this committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Alcantar]

Oral Testimony of Andres Alcantar, Chairman, Texas Workforce Commission

U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

“Texas’ Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans”

November 6, 2013

Good morning Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I am Andres Alcantar, Chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony and appear before this committee.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) partners with 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and fellow state agencies such as the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to provide a broad range of employment, job training and related services to our veterans. All veterans walking through the doors at our workforce solutions offices across the state receive priority of service across employment and support service programs. These programs include Employment Services, Workforce Investment Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP), Child Care and other support services. This priority of service extends to TWC’s WorkInTexas.com, the state’s largest database for matching job seekers with employers, with a two day veteran hold on all postings to ensure veterans receive first viewing and the opportunity for applying. We are also a partner in Texas’ dedicated website, Texas Veterans Portal, where veterans, families, and survivors can find helpful information from across a number of government agencies.

To further demonstrate our commitment to assisting veterans, let me take a few minutes to highlight a handful of programs at TWC. First and happening next week, TWC in partnership with our Boards and TVC will host in 27 cities across the state “Hiring

Red, White and You!” veteran job fairs on November 14th. Last year’s event attracted more than 12,000 veterans and 1,400 employers statewide, and resulted in approximately 2,800 hires by participating employers. We hope to exceed those numbers this year.

Military veterans possess the skills, discipline and leadership experience that are ideally suited to employers in need of a ready and available workforce. The “Hiring Red, White & You!” effort connects veterans with employers in order to help these individuals successfully transition to civilian life through employment.

Another exciting program we have developed in Texas is College Credit for Heroes. Established by the 82nd Texas Legislature, the College Credit for Heroes initiative aims to maximize the amount of college credit that our heroes receive for their military training and occupational experience, reducing the amount of time a veteran spends in the classroom.

In July 2011, TWC and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) began working on this initiative with seven colleges. Central Texas College developed an integral part of the effort - www.collegecreditforheroes.org - a web-based application for veterans and service members to receive college credit hours for prior military education and training via an official transcript. Veterans utilizing this application are receiving an average of 25 college credits per evaluation, equivalent to almost one year of college. As of October 1, 2013, the website has received over 30,000 visits and has 17,000 veteran and service member account holders who have requested almost 2,000 evaluations for college credit.

Recently, the program expanded to include 6 new partner schools. In addition, four of the originating institutions were awarded additional funding to expand their offerings to veteran students. Just last month, the Texas A&M System and all universities operating under the System joined the program and signed agreements committing to review all the transcript evaluations used to award college credit to veterans and service members for their military training. We now have 30 colleges and universities participating in the initiative.

Texas has a high concentration of veterans in our state, an estimated 1.7 million and was one of four states selected to develop a national model for partnerships between the Army and the workforce system, including Unemployment Compensation. The State of Texas Soldier Employment Initiative was developed to find new ways to outreach and provide access to jobs and reemployment services to recipients of Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers (UCX) and, where possible, to reduce the duration of the receipt of UCX benefits. In June 2012, the Texas Workforce Commission was awarded the grant.

The focus of the grant is to provide enhanced outreach and employment services that lead to employment before or shortly after soldiers separate from active duty. A major part of the overall strategy is to build and enhance partnerships between participating entities, improve data sharing, and develop innovative outreach and reemployment strategies for the Veteran population. The overriding goal of the pilot program is to provide meaningful em-

ployment that gives the financial freedom that former service members need to provide for themselves and their families.

In closing, I want to recognize the commitment of our 28 local Boards to serve our veterans, and highlight the efforts of two local boards with military bases in their territory. First, Workforce Solutions of Central Texas has a Business Resource Center jointly supported through a unique partnership of Central Texas College, Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce, and Workforce Solutions of Central Texas. The Business Resource Center provides small and start-up business development guidance, services, and workshops. Veterans benefit from counseling and training for entrepreneurship and small business ownership. Two of the initiatives include the Fort Hood Veterans Entrepreneur Bootcamp and the Fort Hood Region Government Vendor Conference & Exposition.

Another example is underway by our Upper Rio Grande Workforce Board. In September, Board staff met with the Transition Manager at Fort Bliss to discuss how to work better together in matching employers with soldiers and family members. On October 16th, the Board provided its mobile unit and staff to assist soldiers and family members at the Fort Bliss job fair.

The Texas Workforce Commission recognizes that the State of Texas can lead the way for the nation in assisting veterans. This is an ongoing effort that requires many partners working together to ensure that veterans' needs are being fully addressed. These men and women have served their country, and we are proud of them and recognize the sacrifice they and their families have made. Our veterans have real world experience, leadership skills, and education. Their military contributions kept our nation secure, and now their contributions and talents as veterans will continue to make Texas the best place to live, work and do business. Thank you for allowing me to testify and I look forward to answering any questions.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Chairman Alcantar.

Mr. Deabay, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF SHAWN DEABAY

Mr. Deabay. Good morning, Mr. Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and committee members.

My name is Shawn Deabay. I am the Director of Veterans Employment Services for the Texas Veterans Commission. I have been in Veterans Employment Services for close to 14 years and an Army veteran.

I am accompanied by Duncan McGhee, who is also an Army veteran with 30 years private sector experience, and he is our Veteran Entrepreneur Program Manager and also a U.S. Army veteran.

The Texas Veterans Commission has four major programs—Claims Representation and Counseling, Education, Grant Funding, and the Veterans Employment Program. We also, within those four programs, have two initiatives. One is the Women Veterans Initiative and also the Veteran Entrepreneur Program.

So what we have done and we would like to do with the Texas Veterans Commission is find out what the need is in Texas for veterans, and what we learned was that veterans who want to start

their own business found it very confusing, very difficult to maneuver through the process of starting their own business and to realize all of the resources that out there for them to utilize to start their own business.

So April 2012, we launched a Veteran Entrepreneur Program with Duncan, and what he is doing is trying to bridge that gap between those resources and the veterans. He has held seven seminars. Those seven seminars have resulted in 1,000 veterans being assisted towards veterans owning their own business.

He also provides one-on-one counseling services for them to include helping with business plans, just learning what need is of the veteran and doing his best to help them accomplish what they want to accomplish as far as starting their own business. Because of his success, the Veteran Entrepreneur Program was officially started on the 83rd Texas legislative session.

There is another phase to the entrepreneur program, which includes a Business Basics 101 course. We are investigating several existing curriculum sources and engaging with several Texas State universities in creating this curriculum, and Duncan will be able to answer any questions you have about the next phase and where we are going with the entrepreneur program.

Now Veterans Employment Services, you probably know them as LVERs and DVOPs, the JVSG grant that all the States get from Department of Labor and Vets. Basically, we call them job coaches here in Texas. They help the veteran with whatever that need is, whether it is translating military skills, helping with resumes, application assistance, direct placement. Whatever that need is, that veteran that we serve, is what we try to do for them.

We also don't wait for veterans to come in and see us. We are very aggressive. We feel we should see as many veterans as we possibly can and provide high-quality services to them. What makes them successful is the one-on-one aspect of the job. They don't—we don't just rely on automated services, but we provide that one-on-one assistance.

From those job coaches, or LVERs and DVOPs, we have taken four and made them veterans business representatives. Their number-one mission is to outreach to employers to help them with their hiring needs. So we help the veteran, but we also want to help the employers.

And again, we want to identify the need. So what employers tell us a lot is we want to hire veterans, but we do not know where they are. How do we get them? That is where we come in.

We can work with our job coaches, who see approximately 60,000 veterans a year, and help those link up. They can also help them with their resume, make sure it is what the employer wants as far as skills, education level, and experience, and make sure that the veteran possesses those skills.

2011 and 2012, the four business representatives helped employers with 1,428 jobs, resulting in 2,189 veteran resumes and applications to be reviewed by employers. That contributed to the overall success of the last 12-month period of 32,224 veterans locating and having employment, with 84.02 percent retaining employment. So we are very proud of that.

Since the inception of the VBR program, our quality of our services has gone up. In other words, the number of veterans we see, there is a higher percentage of those finding employment.

In closing, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about what the Texas Veterans Commission is doing. Again, our goal is to serve as many veterans as possible. With so many transitioning service members coming back and will be coming back, we owe it to our Nation's heroes to do the very best that we possibly can.

And I just want to thank you very much for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Deabay]

Good Morning, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and Members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of our Chairman, Eliseo "Al" Cantu, and the Commissioners of the Texas Veterans Commission, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify before you today and for your interest in the efforts the state of Texas has undertaken in order to serve the 1.7 million Veterans in our state.

My name is Shawn Deabay and I have the privilege of serving as the Director of Veterans Employment Services at the Texas Veterans Commission. As such, I am responsible for the management and execution of the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) from the U.S. Department of Labor Veteran Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS) for the state of Texas. I also provide oversight to our new Veterans Entrepreneur Program (VEP).

Joining me today is Mr. Duncan McGhee, the Program Manager for the Veterans Entrepreneur Program (VEP). A veteran of the United States Army, Duncan brings over 30 years of private sector experience as a "serial entrepreneur" prior to building this new program at the Texas Veterans Commission.

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

The Texas Veterans Commission is the Veterans advocacy agency for the state of Texas. Our mission is to advocate for and provide superior service to Veterans in the areas of claims assistance, employment services, education, and grant funding that will significantly improve the quality of life for all Texas Veterans, their families and survivors. The Texas Veterans Commission provides these services through four program areas: Claims Representation and Counseling, Veterans Employment Services, Veterans Education Program, and the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Additionally, the Texas Veterans Commission has three initiatives that connect Veterans with services: Veterans Communication and Outreach, Women Veterans Initiative, and the Veterans Entrepreneur Program.

No other state has centralized all of these program areas within their state's Veterans agency. Texas is becoming recognized for aggressively leading on Veteran issues. National leaders have referred to the "Texas-model" when advocating for the integration of Veterans services. This integration allows the agency to remain Veteran focused, with no competing priorities.

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (VES)

The Texas Veterans Commission offers employment services to all Veterans in Texas through our Veterans Employment Services

(VES) program. The goal of these services is to match Veteran job seekers with the best opportunities available. In addition, employers are matched with qualified Veterans.

Veterans Employment Representatives (VER) provides a full range of employment services. VERs are specifically trained to assist Veterans with job applications, resume preparation, job matching, job searches, and other employment services. VES has 152 VERs located in 92 Workforce Centers in 75 cities throughout Texas to provide one-on-one assistance to Veterans.

Approximately 99% of funding for VES is provided through a federal grant from the Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS), with additional state General Revenue to support three (3) FTEs for the Family Employment Assistance Counselor (FEAC) program. Under this grant program, funds are allocated to TVC in direct proportion to the number of Veterans seeking employment within their state.

VETERAN BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES (VBRs)

To help Texas Veterans get back to work or into better jobs, there must be a substantial coordination with employers. Providing support to employers creates more opportunities to better serve Veterans. Helping employers fill job vacancies provides the greatest potential to positively affect employer relations and improve the well-being of all Veterans.

Through media coverage and active marketing, TVC has been inundated with employer phone calls and email correspondence from across Texas and the nation, eager to hire skilled Veterans. Because of this increased demand TVC expanded the Business Outreach Program to four positions, in 2011, and designating them as Veterans Business Representatives (VBR). The VBRs are strategically located in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin and are vested in building relationships with large companies and influential Texas employers in an effort to promote the hiring of highly qualified Veterans. They work hand in hand with Texas Workforce Commission business service units (BSU) to outreach to employers and employer organizations such as SHRM and local chambers of Commerce.

A VBR is an advocate for job-seeking Veterans, through employer outreach activities. VBRs use employer outreach as a tool to promote the advantages of hiring Veterans to employers and employer groups. The focus of the program is on marketing job seeking Veterans/eligible spouses as individuals who have highly marketable skills and experience.

VBRs advocate for Veterans with business, industry, and other community-based organizations by participating in a variety of outreach activities such as:

- ? Planning and participating in job and career fairs.
- ? Coordinating with unions, apprenticeship programs, and business organizations to promote employment and training programs for Veterans.
- ? Informing Federal contractors of their responsibility to recruit and re-train qualified Veterans.
- ? Promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities.

In 2011 and 2012, the VBRs helped employers recruit for 1,428 jobs. This resulted in 2,819 Veteran resumes being reviewed by em-

employers. Over the next few years the military will continue to draw down troops at an unprecedented level in an economically challenging situation. The VBR program is bridging the gap between job-seeking Veterans and employers that are eager for Veteran employees.

VETERAN ENTREPRENEUR PROGRAM

There is another innovative component to meeting the Veteran employment need in Texas. In April 2012, the Texas Veterans Commission launched a pilot project to focus on promoting entrepreneurship among veterans which has hosted a series of seven seminars throughout the state and assisted over 1,000 Veterans towards entrepreneurship.

Based upon this highly successful pilot project, the Veteran Entrepreneur Program, was formally established by passage of Senate Bill 1476, authored by State Senator Royce West, during the 83rd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. State Representative Ralph Sheffield, who also sponsored the legislation in the Texas House, successfully secured funding in the state budget to fund this new program.

The purpose of the Veteran Entrepreneur Program is to foster and promote Veteran Entrepreneurship throughout the state of Texas.

Today's Veterans are poised to be the backbone of a new generation of small businesses that can quickly build a sustainable new jobs base in Texas. Veterans are eager to build for themselves, their families, and their Veteran employees, long-term careers and secure retirements through small business ownership.

The goal of Veteran Entrepreneur Program is to create a veritable army of Veteran Entrepreneurs throughout the state of Texas. These Veteran Entrepreneur businesses will add value to the communities where they are established and create employment opportunities for other Veterans.

The Veteran Entrepreneur Program is delivering value to Veterans and the state of Texas in the following ways:

- 1) Bridging the gap between the available resources and Veteran Entrepreneurs. Through the Veteran Entrepreneur Seminar series and in response to requests from individual Veterans the Entrepreneur Program is connecting Veteran Entrepreneurs with community resources, funding sources and sources of continuing education.

- 2) Providing one-on-one business guidance and counseling. Veteran Entrepreneurs contact the Veteran Entrepreneur Program seeking answers to a broad array of business challenges across an amazing spectrum. From a mere introduction to simple business ideas to complex strategies for expanding and growing a business the Veteran Entrepreneur Program meets the challenge and, in every case to date, has exceeded expectations.

- 3) Conducting Seminars. The Veteran Entrepreneur Program conducts a series of seminars around the state that provide a one-stop-shopping experience where Veterans and a broad array of resources come together under one roof. Veterans are not only able to have their specific questions answered in this forum, they also enjoy the advantage of hearing their fellow Veteran Entrepreneurs

interface with the resources and are exposed to new ideas and concepts in the process.

To date, the Veteran Entrepreneur Program has attained phenomenal success on a limited budget. From April of 2012 until now, the program has operated with a single, dedicated resource and achieved the following documented successes of veterans served:

Business Plan Assistance 17

Financing & Structure 38

Resource Information 1,146

Total 1,201

The Texas Veterans Commission Veteran Entrepreneur Program will continue to provide the services outlined above but currently is developing the next phase; a "Business Basics 101" course. This will be an application driven program wherein Veteran Entrepreneurs will enter the Program with an idea and leave with the tools, knowledge and funding necessary for successful business ownership.

The Veteran Entrepreneur Program is investigating several existing curriculum sources and engaging several Texas state universities in the creation of entrepreneur curriculum.

CLOSING

The state of Texas is leading on Veteran issues. The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the Texas Legislature demonstrated their commitment to the Veterans of Texas this past legislative session by passing a number of key legislative initiatives for Veterans and by obligating significant funding for programs to assist Veterans in our state. State leaders deserve recognition for taking bold actions to serve the Veterans of our state.

Veterans in Texas are also served by an active Congressional delegation that continually seeks to improve the services and benefits provided to them.

Our goal at the Texas Veterans Commission is to assist as many Veterans as we can while continuing to provide high-quality services. There will be thousands of military service men and women coming home over the next few years, which will increase the need for our services. We owe it to our nation's heroes to assist them with their employment needs when they come home. Employment stabilizes Veterans and their family's lives allowing them to make the difficult transition from military to civilian life.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Thank you for the work are doing, and will do, on behalf of Texas Veterans, and all Veterans, of this nation's Armed Forces.

ELISEO "AL" CANTU, JR., Major, US Army (Retired), Chairman

DANIEL P. MORAN, Captain, USMC (Retired) Member

JAMES H. SCOTT, Colonel, USAF (Retired) Vice Chairman

J.K. "JAKE" ELLZEY, Commander, US Navy (Retired) Member

REV. RICHARD McLEON IV, US Army Veteran Secretary

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

THOMAS P. PALLADINO, Colonel, US Army (Retired) Executive Director

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Deabay.

I thank the third panel for their testimony.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions. Chairman Alcantar, tell us a little bit about the success of last year's Red,

White, and You job fairs, and what do you have planned for this coming week?

Mr. Alcantar. I am really proud of the way our local boards have worked with our local partners. These veterans job fairs are free of charge. They are free of charge to the employer. The whole goal is to make sure that we help our veterans make a successful transition.

Twenty-seven locations across the State on the same day last year, the week of Veterans Day, like we are doing again this year November 14th, we had over 1,400 employers that hired over 2,800 veterans or their spouses. Because we are not only targeting veterans, we understand the commitment and sacrifice of the spouses.

And in addition to making these fairs available, we also have for them opportunities for them to take advantage of our Skills for Veterans program and connect them with the other services that we have available through our One-Stops all across the State.

Mr. Flores. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Deabay, tell us a little bit about the services that are provided by the veterans benefits representatives that provide the local veteran employment representative, or LVERs. What do they provide that LVERs don't provide? Can you walk me through that?

And you know, here is kind of where I am going. It seems like to some of us on the subcommittee that we need to change the—that DOL should change the mission of LVERs to match the more successful model that you use. Can you walk us through that?

Mr. Deabay. Right. So our LVERs, they do provide services to veterans, and I only have—only, I know, 152. But Texas is a very large State. So they serve a lot of veterans.

What the business representatives are able to do is solely focus their purpose on helping employers and then being able to leverage the LVERs and DVOPs in the field to help supply. What would not work is to have the veterans business representatives go to employers and then come back without those veterans to be able to refer to them and be able to source them.

So the LVERs take care of the—they also outreach to employers, but not to the scale of a veterans business representative. So the LVERs will handle maybe the smaller, the more localized companies while the veterans business representatives are regionally placed so they can look at the larger companies and what their overall need is to hire veterans.

Mr. Flores. Okay. Thank you.

And then, Mr. Deabay, talk a little bit more about the Texas model and the benefits to having all the—all your services under one roof, all your services for veterans under one roof.

Mr. Deabay. Yes, well, when veterans come into the workforce center, we partner with, obviously the workforce commission and the local boards. There is—employment is the end game, but there is a lot of obstacles before you get to being employment ready.

To be able to have our claims counseling, to have our education, to know all of the grants that we provide to help veterans get through all of the tough times to get to employment. At the end of the day, we are there to help with employments. But to have everything within the veterans commission is so helpful to have all

those resources to help them overcome those obstacles to get them employment ready faster.

Mr. Flores. Okay. And Chairman Alcantar, do you have the results of the Texas Soldier Employment Initiative, and how has that program reduced the reliance on UCX benefits?

Mr. Alcantar. Well, the progress to date is very promising. The goal is to really connect our veterans, as they are returning home, a little bit faster.

And through our partnership with TVC and with the four boards that we are working together that are participating in this grant, we have been able to reduce the amount of time that our veterans are receiving unemployment from around approximately 24 weeks to around 19 weeks. It is a very positive trend.

We continue to find ways to take advantage of all of our other competencies related to translating working with the soldiers prior to their release, working with the veterans after they have released to really identify and connect them to the different services that we have available through our One-Stops. I think that is a very positive model.

Yet the merging of our infrastructure in a way that benefits the core competencies that TVC brings into it really is at the heart of this integrated model that at its core basis has alignment with the employers in different industries in these different communities, really generating the results that we are looking for.

The best part of this partnership is that we are engaging and doing these very thoughtful, aligned solutions in communities where Texas is creating jobs, and they are creating jobs across all of our major industries, and that is a positive trend.

Mr. Flores. Thank you.

Mr. Takano, you are recognized for 5 minutes for questions.

Mr. Takano. Mr. Deabay, can you just elaborate a little more on your entrepreneur program? How many veterans have started businesses after attending the Veteran Entrepreneur Program?

Mr. Deabay. Okay. I would like to yield to Mr. McGhee.

Mr. McGhee. Thank you very much.

Duncan McGhee, with the Texas Veterans Commission Veteran Entrepreneur Program.

There is no way to know exactly how many because there are so many resources that are provided. I have helped over 1,300 veterans with regard to information, but the individuals that I have had direct contact with in terms of helping them with business plans, helping them start their businesses, helping them to find funding. I say I have started—that is being arrogant.

I have assisted more than 22 businesses getting launched that I know for a fact that I have had a hand in helping.

Mr. Takano. What type of businesses are those they have launched?

Mr. McGhee. That is a great question. It is across the board. There is businesses that, quite frankly, I would never do in a lifetime. I have spent 30 years as a serial entrepreneur, and I helped one gentleman start a tour company, a bicycle tour company in downtown Houston.

If you know the traffic in Houston and you make that connection, that is a bit of—that is something I just couldn't see myself doing,

quite frankly. But on the other end of the spectrum, but I have helped him get started, helped him get capitalized with his business plan, and they are actually very successful. They broke even in 6 months, and they are doing phenomenal. So, yay.

The flip side of that is I helped another business down in the what is called the Eagle Ford Shale to generate capital with a trucking business. They wanted to expand their business and add trucks, dump trucks. So I helped them to create a business plan, identify the market, make the market granular and pursue \$200,000 in capital for that business.

So there is really no one set business. It is really veterans who are coming out today have this amazing vision, if you will, for what it is they want to do and what they want to accomplish. What they don't have is they don't have the business acumen and experience to take those ideas and put them into a solid plan, and that is what we do.

Mr. Takano. I see from the written testimony that you have the intention to develop a Business 101 course.

Mr. McGhee. That is correct.

Mr. Takano. And it looks like it is in conjunction with a number of different Texas institutions.

Mr. McGhee. Well, we interfaced with a number of institutions to see if we could help them or have them help us create a curriculum. That didn't turn out the way we had hoped it would in terms of that dialogue. So I am in the process of creating a curriculum myself.

I worked with a number of CDFIs, community development financial institutions. They have agreed to capitalize any of the businesses that go through our program with a minimum of \$20,000 at a 5 percent loan rate and up to as much as \$100,000 depending on the value proposition.

So what we are doing right now, what I am doing right now is taking—building a curriculum that over the course of 6 to 8 weeks, based on weekends, I can bring veterans in and do a very crash course, down and dirty, “this is what you do.” I mean, very granular, but very quick get them through this process.

And then at the end of that process, it will be a shark tank sort of an event where they know they have \$20,000. But if they want more, then they will have to go, you know, they will have to do the shark tank thing to make it happen.

Mr. Takano. So I essentially see growing of the effort to provide some sort of training or education on the basics of running the business, and then trying to connect veterans with some sort of start-up capital?

Mr. McGhee. That is correct.

Mr. Takano. Do you see a need to organize this more coherently?

Mr. McGhee. I do. There is a number of things. There is a number of things that we could do. You know, one is to do it coherently, absolutely.

I have veterans from across the country, quite frankly, that are contacting me. I have veterans from California. I have veterans from Florida, from all around the country who are contacting me, going, “Can you help me with my business?” And the answer is, “Yes, I can.”

I have developed a process. It is a very clean, very simple process. It is 10 steps for starting your business. There is resources that are localized to those veterans that can help them through that process.

But if there are some sort of way to standardize that across the country, then there obviously would be somewhat better. And there is a number of things that we could do at the Federal level that are very, very simple modifications that would yield huge results.

For example, if you look at the GI bill, if we made just a modest, modest change to the post 9/11 GI bill, we could make some mods there, too.

Mr. Takano. Mr. McGhee, I am sorry. My time is up.

Mr. McGhee. Thank you.

Mr. Takano. And I hope that through written testimony or personal contact with our offices to find out more about this.

Mr. McGhee. I will be happy to do so.

Mr. Flores. You have 30 seconds remaining or so —

Mr. Takano. Yes, Mr. Chairman, if you would indulge me. If you would elaborate more on these simple Federal fixes?

Mr. McGhee. Sure. Again, as I said, post 9/11. If you take a look at post 9/11, as an example, it has a provision for on-the-job training. For those individuals who don't want to pursue a traditional education, there is on-the-job training.

But that on-the-job training pretty much, by virtue of the way it is structured, precludes you from leveraging that for a franchise. So we have had lots of conversation today about franchises. But if I were a post 9/11 veteran and I were to come into a franchise organization and then use that training as part of my on-the-job training, at the end of that, I would basically have \$17,000. That could go a long way towards this.

The other thing that we could do from a pure entrepreneur perspective is if we look at some of the Federal contracts we do, a real good example of that would be if you were to look at the U.S. Army's military installation and contracting command, they have an advance—they have a spreadsheet that shows you all the various contracts that are coming up for Federal contracts within the military posts.

In Texas alone, we have Fort Sam, Fort Bliss, Fort Hood, and that is over—there is over \$3 billion in contracts that are available, but less than 1 percent are for veteran businesses. And even that 1 percent, that 1 percent is only 3 contracts that are very unique.

There are things on those military posts like lawn maintenance that I could put my hand on two dozen veteran businesses tomorrow that could do that contract, yet that is not set aside for them or that is not for veteran businesses. It is for a small business, which is great. But there ought to be some allocation, in my opinion, for veterans, especially when you are looking at military installations.

And then the third thing that we could take a look at is how we are spending dollars, or how the Federal Government is spending dollars today in those various—within the States. So, as an example, we look at we have what is called the Veteran Business Outreach Centers. They do a great job.

They are called VBOCs, and they are really good organizations and do a phenomenal job. But they have some limitations.

And so, if you look at Texas, for example, our VBOC is located in Harlingen. That is the furthest southernmost tip of our State, and in terms of their ability to provide services to veterans or veterans to access that service, it is a challenge. And then on top of that, some of the dollars that are allocated for that are spent on overhead versus on actually going towards meeting the needs of veterans.

So those are just three things that as I look at it from a very high level, just minor modifications to those three things could have a huge impact in terms of how we are able to help veterans start and grow their businesses.

Mr. Takano. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that 30 seconds.

Mr. Flores. I am glad that you asked. That was good.

Mr. Williams, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. Williams. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank all three of you for being here. You are doing a fantastic job. Chairman, appreciate it.

But I want to follow through with, Duncan, you are doing a great job in explaining today. I had just a couple questions. You have done a pretty good job in answering. But I am a business guy. I come from the private sector, still own a business, been in business 42 years. I am a job creator, everything you are doing.

Just briefly, you touched on the curriculum design. What would be just a typical curriculum? What, from the beginning to end, the things that you cover?

Mr. McGhee. Sure. Sure. So a typical curriculum would be Introduction to Accounting, and not Introduction to Accounting in terms of—so I have been through a number of the larger programs that are out there. I have been to the EBV program. It is a great program. But it is designed for organizations, for veterans who are already in business.

Where the veterans that I am interfacing with really don't understand a debit from a credit. So you have to get down to the granular level, but do it in such a way it is basic. It is basic training for that. So the introduction to that.

And at the same time you are introducing that, we will have some software that they will be able to input and build, for example, a chart of accounts. This is chart of accounts. Build your chart of accounts. Build this. Then they will be able to take that, and that will be about a 2-hour segment, and it is just a very down and dirty introduction.

Marketing, introduce them to marketing. How do you segment the market? What things do you look for, and are you a B2B? Are you B2C? Are you B2G?

And in each of those segments, there is a different value proposition. There is a different message. How do we segment that market, and what are you targeting? So, again, about an hour to 2 hours on that and transition into operations, transition to HR. But do it in such a way that it is very fundamental.

Right now, we talk to these veterans with some relatively high-level stuff. But the veterans that I come in contact with, they really need —

Mr. Williams. How long do you spend with them?

Mr. McGhee. Well, I haven't started doing—I am building the curriculum right now. But in terms of the veterans that I work with, it ranges across the board in terms of how much time I spend with them.

So, right now, I am working with 12 veterans on their business plans, and we are working in terms of wherever their business plan is. In terms of readiness, some of them are not bad. Others, you look at it, and you go, I mean, you are never going to fly with this. So it depends on the veteran, on where they are in the process, and where we want to get to relative to the end game.

So I spend anywhere from 12 to 70 hours with veterans, it just depends, quite frankly. But on the curriculum that we are building, that is going to be, I am estimating, a 6-week, 12-hour—6 weekends, 12 hours a day on a Saturday, 12 hours on a Sunday. And over the course of 6 to 8 weeks of that.

Mr. Williams. That is good. They are lucky to have you.

Now so when they go out there, how do you, as an entrepreneur, as a businessman, how do you see the market out there right now? I mean, financing is still an issue. Angel investors are an issue. How do you see the market as far as starting a new business today?

How do you see—do you think they have got great opportunity? Do you think there is regulations, though, from the Federal Government standpoint that we might be able to kind of whittle down a little bit and give you a little more breathing room, right?

Mr. McGhee. Yes, I look at no matter what the environment, whether we are in a recess or whether we are boom times, there is opportunity. You just have to look for it.

And the veterans that I come in contact with, for the most part, they have identified the opportunity. I don't have to present them with the opportunity. They come to me with ideas, and like I said, some of those ideas, I will think there is just no way I would ever do this. But they are very much excited about what it is that they want to do.

And so, I think there is lots of opportunity in the market. I think the market is ripe for veteran entrepreneurship. And if you look at entrepreneurship in the State of Texas, you know, veterans represent 7 percent of the overall population. But veteran-owned businesses represent 9 percent of the businesses in Texas.

So, anecdotally, it suggests anyway that we are predisposed to business. But what we don't have—and one thing was mentioned earlier with regard to introducing veterans or military personnel to their future earlier than 6 months. I would take that a step further. I would say that if it were me and I had an opportunity to say something, I would say that you would have a day at basic training, just like when I went in 2000, I took part in a very interesting project for generating venture capital.

And within the first 4 minutes of our presentation, we had to have—we had to lay out our exit strategy. They didn't really care about our business. They didn't really care about how we wanted to serve veterans or what we wanted to do. They wanted to know how do I get money? What is your exit strategy?

And if it were me and I had an opportunity to do something different for the military personnel, part of basic training would have a day of what is your exit strategy? Here are the things that are going to be available to you. Here are the things that you can do. And make them start thinking about their exit strategy from day one because at some point, whether you make a career out of the military or you do like I did, do your 3 years and get out, some point military comes to an end, and civilian begins.

Mr. Williams. Thanks for your involvement. Appreciate it.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Flores. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

I would like to thank the panel for your testimony. Andres and Shawn and Duncan, it was very helpful to have you here, and you made this a diverse discussion today from private sector to education to government support, and I appreciate all the testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Takano, for traveling all the way from California to Texas.

And Mr. Williams, you didn't have to travel very far, but thank you for joining us here in Waco.

Mr. Williams. Glad to be here.

Mr. Flores. I would like to thank all of the audience for their participation today.

Before we adjourn, I would like to extend my thanks again to the students, the staff, and the administration of Baylor University for hosting us and for our witnesses that took time out of their busy schedules to be here.

I also want to remind the audience that we have a resource table out in the Fentress Room, which is to the right out the hall, and I would ask our veterans and guests to be sure and to avail themselves of that.

I would like to thank the representatives for Congressman Carter's office for being here today as well.

I would like to thank Baylor for giving us the great "Veterans of Baylor" T-shirts, and also I think it says "From salutes to sic 'em" on the back. Now be sure and wear your blackout shirts tomorrow when you all beat the heck out of OU. So probably have to wear a coat, too, based on what I saw about the weather.

I would ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend the remarks and to include any extraneous materials on today's hearing. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

Mr. Flores. And this hearing is now adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:18 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Aggie Vet Connect Program:

Texas A&M University Veteran Resource & Support Center

Program Description: Due to a lack of communication and programming, many of our 600+ student veterans are dis-connected from the available university and local resources. Aggie Vet Connect is one of our first major initiatives. It will become a full range of programs developed and organized by the VRSC in partnership with other offices and organizations. It is designed to proactively facilitate the engagement of student veterans to help identify those in need of additional academic or mental well-being assistance. Specific programs include:

- New Student Conference and sponsorship programs that:
 - o Connect current veteran students with new veteran students to facilitate transition to TAMU.
 - o Enables early identification of wounded warriors and facilitates student veteran data collection.
- Peer-to-peer veteran student mentoring program (which includes formal mentor training).
- Faculty/Staff connections with student veterans to facilitate:
 - o Faculty/Staff awareness of unique needs of student veterans/wounded warriors, signs/symptoms of PTSD/TBI, and military-to-student transition issues.
 - o Faculty/Staff sensitivity to student veteran experiences.
 - o Faculty/Staff “ATM Veteran Mentor” participation.
 - o Student veteran awareness of, and interaction with, veteran faculty/staff members.
- Increase overall campus awareness of student veteran/wounded warrior experiences.

Program Goals: Our overall goal is to improve the TAMU student veteran/wounded warrior success rates. Measurement of this goal is elusive; there is very little existing data on previous/current success rates. Sub goals include:

1. Develop TAMU’s first proactive student veteran transition support program that meets the critical needs of student veterans/wounded warriors as they enter Texas A&M.
2. Better identify the TAMU student veteran population (beyond benefit certification data) to facilitate on-going student needs and program assessments to improve student and program success rates.
3. Facilitate early contact (prior to 1st class day) with student veterans better connect them with additional existing on-campus resources as needed.

4. In partnership with the TAMU Academic Success Center, develop TAMU's first proactive student veteran peer-to-peer mentoring program to improve academic performance.

5. Expand our (currently limited) faculty/staff programs to meet the critical needs of returning service members (i.e., early identification of student veteran transitional problems or PTSD/TBI).

6. Develop a systematic program to improve faculty/staff (focused on academic advisors) engagement with student veterans/wounded warriors.

7. Develop new programs and facilitate unique opportunities that connect student veterans with the greater student body.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The Aggie Vet Connect Program is comprised of seven sub-programs.

1. New/Transfer Student Conference Student Veteran Program

Participants: All new/transfer undergraduate TAMU student veterans and wounded warriors. Mandatory Student Veteran Information Session: All veterans must attend (military dependent attendance is highly encouraged) to receive information on benefits and VRSC military affiliated programs/opportunities.

Vet Connect Event: At the end of Day 1 of the conference, new student veterans and dependents are invited to meet with current veteran students, dependents, and selected faculty/staff for a "1-on-1 engagement" social event to facilitate transition into the university environment and learn more about student veteran/wounded warrior programs.

2. Vet Camp - This is a 1-day orientation program conducted prior to the 1st day of class. It is designed to get student veterans ready for their classes and to facilitate their transition to Texas A&M.

Participants: Vet Camp will be open to all new student veterans (it is mandatory for some specified veteran co-enrollment students when the new VETS Program is approved by TAMU).

Vet Connect Event: As one part of this program participants will select and meet their student veteran peer mentor and their faculty/staff mentor. They will also connect with other campus veteran/wounded warrior support offices to include representatives from Student Counseling Services, Academic Success Center, and Academic Advisors.

3. Vet Connect Breakfasts/Lunches - These events will be used to facilitate a recurring opportunity to improve and expand faculty/staff/advisor engagement with student veterans.

Participants: This event will be open to all TAMU student veterans.

Vet Connect Event: At each breakfast/lunch, one or more university faculty, staff or advisors will be invited by student veterans as their "Guest(s) of Honor." Although the agenda will be informal, the guest will be asked to provide a brief background on their role at TAMU, their military experience (if applicable), and their advice on student success. Student veteran participants will be asked to share their background/military experiences and ask questions of the guest.

4. Recreational Sports Veteran/Wounded Warrior Engagement Activities – In partnership with TAMU Recreational Sports, the

Aggie Adaptive Sports Club and the Student Veterans Association, the VRSC will assist in coordinating participant sports events that draw student veterans/wounded warriors and other non-veteran students together.

Participants: This event will be open to all TAMU student veterans/wounded warriors. The leadership of the Aggie Adaptive Sports Club and the Student Veteran Association will be asked to identify students from other TAMU student organizations to participate with the student veterans/wounded warriors.

Sports Activities: The specific activity may include adaptive sports or other sport/event already programmed by TAMU Recreational Sports during the semester.

Vet Connect Event: These events are designed to facilitate unique opportunities that connect student veterans/wounded warriors with the greater student body.

5. **Faculty/Staff Veteran Awareness/Training Sessions** – These sessions are designed to expand faculty/staff programs to meet the critical needs of returning service members. Topics will vary but may include PTSD/TBI awareness, student veteran needs, veteran scholarship opportunities/financial aid, Wounded Warrior Higher Education Program, and veteran career counseling trends/information.

Participants: Faculty, staff and advisors along with student veterans.

Vet Connect Event: The student veteran panel will serve as the “Capstone Event” to improve faculty, staff and advisor engagement with student veterans/wounded warriors.

6. **Student Veteran Peer-to-Peer Mentor Training Classes** – These sessions will be a mandatory requirement for all student veterans that want to participate in the peer-to-peer mentoring program.

Participants: Any student veteran who has been at TAMU for at least one semester and meets academic requirements.

Vet Connect Event: At the conclusion of each semester, the VRSC will conduct a peer-to-peer mentoring program assessment event. All participants will be asked to meet and provide input and discuss the value of the program and ways to improve student veteran peer mentoring efforts.

7. **Special Events** – These events will be identified as opportunities become available. They may include special veteran workshops, conferences, meetings or events and will be used to expand other programs to meet the critical needs of returning service members and to increase veteran awareness and connections across campus.

Participants: To be determined by the nature of the event.

Vet Connect Event: To be determined by the nature of the event.

